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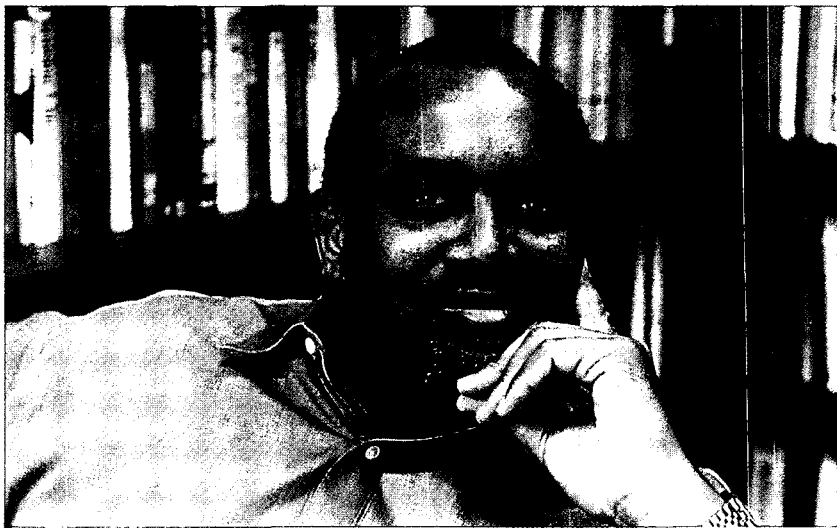
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Some thoughts on what the congregations do

“God Talk” and Public Policy

I am delighted to see this issue of the *Brookings Review* being devoted to the subject of religion in American public life. I say this not primarily because I am a believer, but because as a social scientist I now find it imperative to think seriously about the “God talk” we hear with increasing frequency these days and to consider what it might mean for formulating and executing public policy.

In recent years I have grown dissatisfied with the clinical, abstract accounts of human behavior that underlie our purportedly scientific study of society.



The human beings in these accounts are soulless creatures—utility-maximizing buyers and sellers, behaviorally conditioned violators of the law, genetically predisposed substance abusers, and the like. This brand of social science propounds theories about the mechanisms of human action that omit any consideration of what most makes us human—our awareness of our own mortality and our fitful, uncertain, often unsuccessful attempts to give our lives some meaning that just might transcend our pitifully brief existence. My sense is that this omission has left social scientists less well equipped to prescribe remedies for the most serious social problems that our societies now confront.

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Permit me to offer an illustration. One of the leading social scientists of our time is James Q. Wilson, whose piece in this issue is worthy of particularly close attention. Over the years Wilson has written wisely and well about how parents discipline their children and about the consequences of such behavior for the later-life sociability of their charges. He has argued that regularly providing modest positive and negative reinforcements to a young child for good and bad actions lowers the risk of antisocial behavior as the child enters adolescence. Once allowed to develop, these antisocial behaviors are hard to change. So if the character-shaping tutelage of vigilant parents is missing in early childhood, the young adult who emerges may turn out to be incorrigible.

This is a matter of no small policy significance, since millions of children in the most disadvantaged quarters of our society are growing to maturity absent conscientiously applied parental discipline. And yet, a great many people connected with religious institutions are laboring, in the most marginal of American communities, to turn these “incorrigibles” in a different direction. These religiously inspired activists confront young adults who received neither proper nutrition in infancy nor sufficient verbal stimulation as toddlers, who never learned to internalize as second nature the difference between right and wrong, and who have committed the acts that incorrigible, undisciplined adolescents commit. Yet despite all that, with God’s help, as they would say, these lives have been turned around.

What is interesting to me—as a social scientist, to be sure, but also as a citizen—is what I will call the anti-deterministic character in this way of thinking. Most social science offers deterministic accounts of human action, with some probability distribution around the predicted behavior that is meant to account for errors in our observations. Our theories say, in effect, that material conditions mediated by social institutions cause us to behave in a certain way. Yet surely it is more plausible to hold that material and institutional givens can at best establish only a fairly

wide range within which behavior must lie, and that the specific actions within this range for any particular human being will depend on motivation, will, and spirit—that is, on what a person takes to be the source of meaning in his or her life, on what animates him or her at the deepest level.

If this is right, then what is crucial to grasp is the implication that the behavior of freely choosing, socially situated, spiritually endowed human beings will in some essential way be indeterminate, unpredictable, even mysterious. For if human behavior is in substantial part a consequence of what people understand to be meaningful, of what they believe in, then the processes of social interaction and mutual stimulation that generate and sustain patterns of belief in human

abstract goals. We are ever capable, as Vaclav Havel has said so well, of “transcending the world of existences.”

I admit to being deeply moved by this fact about human experience—that we are spiritual creatures, generators of meaning, beings that must not and cannot “live by bread alone.” I have seen the power for good (and for ill) of communal organization acting through the constitution of collectivities that are like-minded in their understandings about the meaning of life, about, as the believers say, “what God put us here for.”

Until social science takes this aspect of the human drama with the utmost seriousness, it will do justice neither to its subjects of study, nor to the national community that looks to it for useful advice about a host of social ills.

An important consideration here, of course, is the proper role of government. I would like to conclude with this observation: however one reads the Constitution, the fact is that, willy-nilly, government must play an important role in that process of belief construction and propagation. We are not going to withdraw from the public support of indigent families or public provision of educational services, or from the maintenance of civil order through the coercive institutions of policing and incarceration. Billions of public dollars will be spent, and public institutions are going to be created. This money and these institutions will interact, helpfully or not, with what communities of believers are trying to achieve. The centrality of religious experience in the lives of so many Americans must therefore be reckoned with by the prudent exponent of public policy.

For my own part, I pray that broadly based, deeply rooted, powerfully led, spiritually anointed movements in our most disadvantaged communities will not just be tolerated by our public institutions, but that as a nation we will find ways of supporting these communities of faith as they seek—in mysterious and unpredictable ways—to transform, and to transcend, the social reality. ■

I admit to being deeply moved by this fact about human experience—that we are spiritual creatures, generators of meaning, beings that must not and cannot “live by bread alone.”

communities become centrally important. But these processes—persuasion, conformity, conversion, myth-construction, and the like—are open ended. They are, at best, only weakly constrained by material conditions. That is, while what we believe about the transcendent powerfully shapes how we act in a given situation, these beliefs cannot themselves be deduced as a necessary consequence of our situation. We can always agree to believe differently, or more fervently—particularly if those with whom we are most closely connected are undergoing a similar transformation. Religious revivals and reformations can sweep through our ranks and change our collective view of the world virtually overnight. We can be moved to make enormous sacrifices on behalf of

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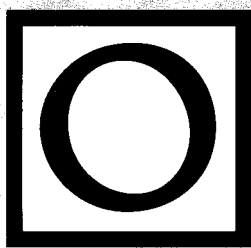
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WHAT'S GOD GOT TO DO WITH THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT?

BY E. J. DIONNE, JR., AND JOHN J. DIULIO, JR.



One could imagine the question posed in the title of this special issue provoking two legions to mass against each other, each offering sharply different accounts of the role of God and organized religion in creating and nurturing the American experiment.

In one view, it is America's pluralistic and secular Constitution that has promoted freedom, diversity, and, oddly, the very strength of American religious communities. A state independent of organized religion has been freedom's, and religion's, finest friend. Was not a central motivation for the creation of free and tolerant institutions a desire to end wars over God and religion?

In the other account, freedom itself is rooted in a theistic—many would say Judeo-Christian—commitment to the inviolable dignity of the individual human being. This belief arises, in the

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words of the Declaration of Independence, from “the Law of Nature and of Nature’s God.” A belief in God places healthy restraints on the human tendency to deify political systems or individual political strongmen—and insists that even strongmen are accountable to a Higher Authority.

This argument is as old as our republic, and in truth the two views just offered are not mutually exclusive. The essays presented here make no pretense of settling the debate definitively. As Alan Wolfe writes in these pages, “Two hundred years after the brilliant writings of Madison and Jefferson on the topic, Americans cannot make up their minds whether religion is primarily private, public, or some uneasy combination of the two.” But precisely because of the ambiguities Wolfe describes, arguments about the role of God and religious faith in our democracy are now, and always have been, central to our understanding of its workings.

And therein lies a danger: absolute answers to questions about the relationship of religious faith to our democratic life tend to obscure as much as they illuminate. The history of religion’s relationship to America’s democratic freedoms is told quite differently within different faiths, denominations, and political communities.

We Americans—almost all of us—can be quite inconsistent in our views of how and when religion should influence politics. Many who welcome the prophetic role of the churches in movements to abolish slavery, promote civil rights, and secure social justice are skeptical of applying religion’s prophetic voice to matters such as abortion, sexuality, or family life. Many who welcome the second set of commitments can be just as wary of crusades rooted in a social gospel.

In his autobiography, the Rev. Jerry Falwell is admirably candid in acknowledging the contrast between his reaction to church-based civil rights activists in 1965 (“Preachers are not called upon to be politicians but to be soul winners,” he said then) and his later embrace of political activism in response to the Supreme Court’s 1973 decision legalizing abortion. Falwell’s words are worth remembering as you read Taylor Branch’s powerful essay—drawn from his book *Parting the Waters*—on Dr. Martin Luther King’s address on the Montgomery bus boycott.

Robert Shafer/Tony Stone Images

God Meets the Social Scientist

There is a special difficulty for a magazine that has traditionally devoted itself to political, economic, and foreign policy analysis rooted in the traditions of social science neutrality. While there is a long and honorable history of engagement between social science and the study of religion (from Max Weber and Emile Durkheim to Will Herberg, Robert Bellah, and Andrew Greeley), arguments about God and politics rarely stay on the neutral ground defined by the statistical techniques that give comfort to social scientists. For believers, the final answers can never lie in factor analysis or regression coefficients.

Yet paradoxically, the origins of this issue of the *Review* lie precisely in that old tradition of social science research. An organization dedicated to saving historic church buildings, Partners for Sacred Places, invited Ram Cnaan of the University of Pennsylvania to conduct a classic form of the social science study. Partners wanted to know what inner-city congregations were doing to meet the social needs of their neighborhoods. What kind of services did they provide, and to whom?

Cnaan did what social scientists do: he conducted a survey, in his case of 113 congregations in Chicago, Indianapolis, Mobile, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco.

The results of Cnaan's work, reported in these pages, were unsurprising to those who knew what was happening in the religious institutions and yet dramatic nonetheless. Reacting to this study, William J. Bennett noted that social science often involves "the elaborate demonstration of the obvious by methods that are obscure." Cnaan used the most straightforward methodology to capture what people in the trenches of community work see every day.

Simply put: the congregations do a great deal. They set up soup kitchens and feeding programs for the homeless, recreational programs for young children and teens, alliances with neighborhood associations, clothing drives, and important forms of fellowship for the elderly and the sick. One of Cnaan's

most important findings is that congregation members performed these services not primarily on behalf of each other, but for those outside their ranks. This was, to use a favorite term of both social scientists and theologians, "other-regarding" work.

Sacred Places, Civic Purposes

Cnaan's findings are consistent with those of other social scientists. As Father Andrew Greeley aptly summarized the evidence in an essay in *The American Prospect*, research has consistently shown that both "frequency of church attendance and membership in church organizations correlate strongly with voluntary service." The best available data suggest that religious organizations and "relationships related to religion" are

ating poverty. They addressed in particular the proper relationship of government to this work.

The ensuing debate was lively and moving, and it crossed many political lines. At times, representatives of the Gospel Mission movement seemed to share common ground with a representative of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Liberals and conservatives, often at odds on many questions, shared a hopefulness about the activities of churches as providers of services to the poor, as prophetic voices on their behalf, and, in the words of Father Michael Doyle of Sacred Heart Church in Camden, N.J., as "base operators of great community organizing, where people can be brought together to do for themselves."

The new interest in faith-based charity should be seen as a particularly promising aspect of a larger transformation in the discussion of religion and politics in America.

clearly the major forces mobilizing volunteers in America. Even a third of secular volunteers—people who did not volunteer for specifically religious activities—relate their service "to the influence of a relationship based on their religion." Sacred places, it seems, serve civic purposes.

What grew out of the Cnaan study, thanks to help from the Pew Charitable Trusts and the energetic work of Luis Lugo, the director of its religion program, were two meetings sponsored by Brookings in 1997. At the first, in November, Cnaan presented his findings for comment from Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), William Bennett, and a group of inner-city pastors.

At the second meeting, in December, a broad group of activists, religious leaders, and social scientists debated the role of religiously based institutions in allevi-

It's fair to say that the spirit of the meeting was captured in an adage coined by Dr. King. In the struggle against injustice, King said, "God isn't going to do all of it by Himself."

This issue grows out of those meetings. Some of the essays (by Cnaan, Glenn Loury, James Q. Wilson, and John DiIulio) are revised and, especially in Wilson's case, extended versions of their remarks and papers. We also include comments from other participants in those discussions.

We have added new essays, including reports to provide a baseline for the debate—Richard Ostling's historical look at the changes in the nation's religious landscape, and an examination of public attitudes by Robert Blendon, Richard Morin, and their colleagues.

A "Passion for the Possible"

The interest in faith-based charity

should be seen as a particularly promising aspect of a larger transformation in the discussion of religion and politics in America. To characterize the new discussion in what some might see as an excessively optimistic light, it does appear that many among devout believers are more sensitive than their forebears might have been to the demands of religious pluralism and tolerance; and that many Americans inclined toward secularism are more alive now than they were even a decade ago to the contributions made by religious people and

Religion's role in renewing society will most often begin at the level of the individual, not the government. "Religion's chief contribution to morality is to enable people to transform their lives," Wilson writes here. "Faith can only transform one person at a time, and then only as the result of the personal attention of one other person."

Patrick Glynn makes a powerful parallel case. "Religion does its real work in politics not by arousing moral indignation, but by awakening the individual conscience," he writes. "The distinction

Democratic and Republican politicians reflects another aspect of this search for balance. As Glenn Loury put it in an essay in the *New York Times*, "A mature public philosophy acknowledges personal responsibility as one part of the social contract, but also understands the importance of collective responsibility." In Glynn's terms, conscience may prompt individuals to change their own behavior and also prompt them to become agents of social change. The role of faith in either case is not to impose itself through the state, but to move



Lloyd Wolf

institutions to social renewal. "The role of government at all levels is being redefined, but so is the role of religion. We must find new ways to think about the relationship of religion and public life," Jim Wind of the Alban Institute said at the December meeting.

There is also an opening toward a more nuanced understanding of the interaction between religious commitment and social change, between personal transformation and social justice.

is a subtle but important one. Moral indignation drives us to condemn others; conscience prompts us to question ourselves." Or, as the theologian Jurgen Moltmann said of Christian hope, "it will constantly arouse the 'passion for the possible,' inventiveness and elasticity in self-transformation, in breaking with the old and coming to terms with the new."

Contemporary talk about "opportunity" and "responsibility" among both

individual citizens to demand greater responsibility from themselves and from their institutions.

There is also this overarching fact: all the reports of the death of organized religion and religious sentiment in America have been greatly exaggerated. Since the end of the Second World War, we have witnessed what Roger Finke and Rodney Stark have aptly described as the "churching of America," resulting by the mid-1990s in a nation with an

estimated half-million churches, synagogues, and mosques, 2,000 or more religious denominations, and an unknown number of independent churches. In 1995, Gallup's Religion Index, an ongoing measurement of the religious beliefs and practices of the American public, hit a ten-year high. That same year, Nobel economist Robert W. Fogel of the University of Chicago speculated that the United States was in the midst of "its Fourth Great Awakening," a "new religious revival." Staci Simmons's comment on the WJJD?—What Would Jesus Do?—phenomenon is a further piece of evidence for Fogel's assertion.

Charitable Choice

Great Awakening or not, public laws have grown more "faith-friendly." The federal government's latest welfare overhaul (a bill, it might be noted, of which both authors of this essay were critical in many of its other aspects) includes what was labeled the "Charitable Choice" provision. It encourages states to use "faith-based organizations in serving the poor and needy," and requires that religious organizations be permitted to receive contracts, vouchers, and other government funding on the same basis as any other nongovernmental providers of services. Importantly, the measure includes a provision designed to protect "the religious integrity and character of faith-based organizations that are willing to accept government funds."

As enacted in 1996, Charitable Choice covers each of the major federal anti-poverty and social welfare programs (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, and food stamps). Some are now proposing to expand Charitable Choice to juvenile justice programs and other federal policy domains. Many states, notably Texas, have moved aggressively to reorient their antipoverty programs around Charitable Choice.

Charitable Choice has largely been supported by conservatives and opposed by liberals—with some important

exceptions such as Sen. Paul Wellstone of Minnesota. But that is only part of the story. A 1998 survey of 1,236 religious congregations by Mark Chaves of the University of Arizona found that the law may prove of far more benefit to the more liberal congregations. "Politically conservative congregations are much less likely to apply for government funds than are middle-of-the-road or liberal congregations," Chaves found. He also reported that predominantly African-American congregations are "very substantially more likely to be willing to apply for government funds than are white congregations."

In one sense, this is not surprising:

As a country, we are terribly torn about what religion-in-public should mean.

more liberal congregations, and especially the African-American churches, have strong traditions of social outreach to the poor and, in many cases, a history of accepting federal funds in other spheres. Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh cite one study's finding that 63 percent of faith-based child service agencies already receive a fifth or more of their budgets from public funds.

Still, these studies bring home the distortions that can be introduced into discussions of faith-based social services if they are seen only through the liberal-conservative lens. As Chaves notes, "if charitable choice initiatives are successful in reaching American congregations, the congregations most likely to take advantage of them may not be the ones our political and religious leaders expect to take advantage." The more liberal churches may benefit from a conservative initiative.

While Sider and Unruh make a strong and, we think, quite convincing case for Charitable Choice, making Charitable Choice work remains an enormous challenge because constitutional worries about the free exercise of religion cannot be lightly dismissed.

Seen from the perspective of reli-

gious groups, there is the danger that entanglement with government will require them to weaken or water down their faith commitments, no matter how strongly the law tilts in their favor.

Seen from the perspective of those fearful of intimate ties between government and religion, there is legitimate worry that supporting the religious groups with the highest success rates will entail government aid to precisely those organizations that require the strongest level of religious commitment from participants. As scholars such as Sider, Unruh, and Amy Sherman have found, the more spiritually demanding programs appear to produce the best

results. Those who fear that limited government support of religiously based charities could move quickly into "excessive entanglement" with religion can cite the most optimistic research on the success of such programs to justify their concerns.

For that reason, James Q. Wilson's suggestion that we "facilitate the movement of private funds into church-connected enterprises" could provide a useful tool for strengthening the work of the congregations while placing reasonable limitations on government involvement. The truth is that these organizations always will—and always should—rely primarily on private support. Finding a way to strengthen these institutions without implicating government too deeply in their work is the conundrum. One of the most heartening aspects of the current debate is a new openness across political lines to a search for balance that might resolve it.

Religious Wars

To be sure, the debates about religion and politics to which we have become accustomed since the late 1970s have not gone away. The mere mention of government-supported vouchers to allow

children to go to religious schools can unleash a furious debate over the meaning of the First Amendment and whether or not it really requires a “wall of separation.” Controversy over the role of the Christian Coalition and other groups of religious conservatives has not gone away—and won’t anytime soon.

If anything, the battle over President Clinton’s impeachment aggravated relations between liberals (both religious and secular) and organized religious conservatives. Attacks on the Christian Right appeared quite effective for many Democratic candidates in the 1998 elections. The insistence by Christian conservative groups that Congress go ahead with impeaching the president in the face of the election results appeared to play a large role in getting impeachment articles through the House of Representatives to the Senate.

Several essays in this issue explore the Clinton episode, which is destined for some time to shape—and perhaps distort—discussions of religion, morality, and politics. For all the honorable talk about putting the dreadful matter “behind us,” a battle so divisive and so resonant with both moral and partisan meanings is certain to leave a long-lasting imprint on American political discourse.

Many combatants on both sides of the Clinton case were moved to seek religious justifications for their positions. In the final months of the controversy, there was a running argument among pro- and anti-Clinton religious factions about the definitions of forgiveness, the requirements of repentance, and the public use of religious symbols.

There seemed to be a contest over which injunctions mattered most—Judge not lest ye be judged was stacked up against Thou shalt not commit adultery or bear false witness. It was possible to harbor, of both sides, a suspicion that C.S. Lewis voiced decades ago about his fellow Christians: “Most of us are not really approaching the subject in order to find out what Christianity says. We are approaching it in the hope of finding support from Christianity for the views of our own party.” Peter Wehner’s essay, inspired by Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*, is an

amusing but trenchant comment on the dangers of putting religion to the service of politics. Wehner, a conservative activist, offers a strong warning to his own side—but not just to his own side.

The religious confusion bred by the Clinton scandal debate inspired some 140 theologians to issue a “Declaration concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis in the Clinton Presidency,” discussed and critiqued here in a thoughtful essay by Alan Wolfe. He warns that “any attempt to judge political leaders by the standards of religious values raises questions about which values should be used.” Wolfe shares the suspicions of the declaration’s signers about the president’s decision “to seek the judgment of God [and] his fellow parishioners in highly visible, seemingly orchestrated, ways.” Yet he also worries that “not only are they judging Mr. Clinton’s actions, they are also judging the depths of his religious beliefs.” This is an awkward issue to raise in a society that is characterized by religious pluralism—and that has long resisted religious tests for those in public office.

Few in America felt the awkwardness of the president’s very public search for redemption more personally than the Rev. Tony Campolo, who became one of the president’s spiritual counselors. His essay here is a document of our time, a reflection on what it feels like to be caught in the crossfire of a religious skirmish in a political war. One might note this irony: those who criticized Campolo for putting religion to the service of politics may have been calling upon him to do precisely that—to resist the opportunity to minister to the president because of a widespread belief that the president’s quest for counseling was Machiavellian, not authentically spiritual. That Campolo would not have run into such public resistance had he instead counseled a convicted murderer on death row raises interesting questions.

Religion-in-Public

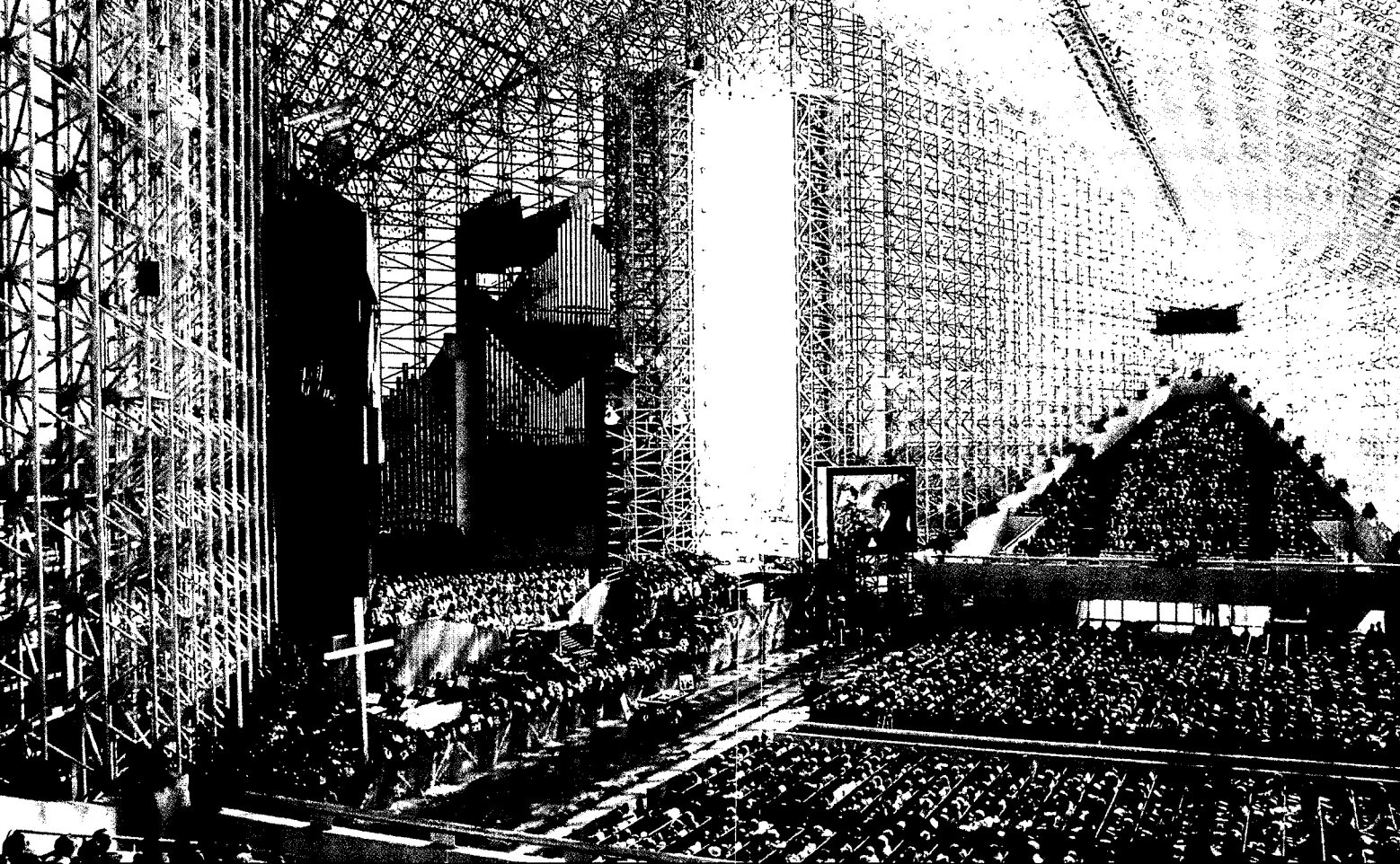
Campolo’s difficulties help explain why religion’s relationship to public life is such a vexing issue. As a country, we are terribly torn about what religion-in-

public should mean. Collectively, we seem suspicious of politicians who are too religious, and suspicious of politicians who are not religious at all. This can lead to the very worst forms of religious expression. As Gregg Easterbrook writes in his recent book, *Beside Still Waters*: “If a politician or celebrity stands up to mumble about being blessed by the Lord, and speaks in a manner unmistakably vacuous and intended for public consumption, nobody minds. If the same person says with conviction, *I really believe* my faith requires me to do this or that, the expression will be condemned as inappropriate.

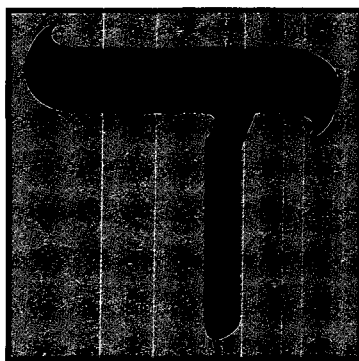
The paradoxes of religious faith are obvious. It can create community, and it can divide communities. It can lead to searing self-criticism, and it can promote a pompous self-satisfaction. It can encourage dissent and conformity, generosity and narrow-mindedness. It can engender both righteous behavior and self-righteousness. Its very best and very worst forms can be inward-looking. Religion’s finest hours have been the times when intense belief led to social transformation, yet some of its darkest days have entailed the translation of intense belief into the ruthless imposition of orthodoxy.

But the history of the United States, despite many outbreaks of prejudice and nativism, is largely a history of religion’s role as a prod to social justice, inclusion, and national self-criticism. In writing about Reinhold Niebuhr and Christopher Lasch, the historian Richard Wightman Fox noted that each saw religion “both as a democratic social power—a capacity to build community—and as a tragic perspective that acknowledges the perennial failing of human beings to make community endure.”

“Religion,” Fox continued, “allows people to grapple with the human mysteries that neither science nor politics can address. But it also provides a force that science and politics can call on in their effort to understand and transform the social world.” For that reason alone, God and arguments about God will always have a great deal to do with the American experiment. ■



WHERE WE'VE COME FROM



he story of religion in the United States is the story of immigration. Ongoing waves of newcomers to this country, in combination with internal developments, have assured that no nation on earth has experienced such wholesale changes in its religious makeup or had such a lavish variety of faiths from which to choose. A brief survey of the past two centuries illustrates the point—and suggests no diminution of the trend in the future.

Richard N. Ostling is a religion writer for the Associated Press. This article is drawn from a lecture given last July at the Van Andel Educators Institute, held at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. This lecture has been published by the Van Andel Institute in a volume entitled K-12 Education: Perspectives on the Future.

In a 1992 book, *The Churching of America: 1776–1990*, sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark note that a 1776 survey of all American religious congregations found groups with British roots dominant. No big surprise there. Congregationalists boasted 668 congregations, Presbyterians 588, Baptists 497, Episcopalians 495, and Quakers 310. Those five Protestant groups accounted for nearly 80 percent of America's congregations. Following them in descending order were the German Reformed Church, Lutherans, the Dutch Reformed Church (now the Reformed Church in America), Methodists,

Catholics (with 65 congregations), and Jews (with 5 synagogues).

By 1850 both immigration and internal evangelism had caused many changes. More than a third of Americans who belonged to a religious body were now Methodists (they had climbed from 9th place in 1776 to 1st place in 1850, mainly because of evangelism). About 21 percent of "churched" Americans were Baptists. Some 14 percent were Catholics (up from 10th place in 1776 to 3rd place in 1850, mostly because of immigration). Presbyterians still claimed 12 percent of churchgoers but were in slow decline. Con-

AMERICA'S EVER-CHANGING RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

— by *Richard N. Ostling*

A N D W H E R E W E ' R E G O I N G

gregationalists had fallen to only 4 percent, Episcopalians to 3.5 percent. Quakers were well back in the pack.

By 1890 the top four groups had again switched places. For the first time, Catholics, with 7.3 million members, including children, claimed first place—a ranking they have kept ever since and always will, barring a massive merger among Protestant groups. Methodists followed with 7.1 million members, Baptists with 5.9 million, and Presbyterians with 1.9 million. Thirty-five years later, in 1925, Baptists had laid permanent claim to being the nation's largest Protestant denomination. Their ascendancy was due both to expansion of white Baptists and to better counting and organization of black Baptist congregations. The mostly white Southern Baptist Convention, despite its name, is represented in all 50 states and has for years been not only the largest Baptist group but the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Now let's leap ahead to 1999. At the end of the millennium, each of two dozen religious bodies has as many local congregations as made up the whole of American religion in 1776. Table 1 illustrates not only the decline and fall of the Colonial masters, but also the rise of new denominations since Colonial days and the vast variety in American religion today. Nobody knows the number of independent evangelical charismatic congregations, but the totals would be toward the top of the list.

Protestant Secularization: The Rise of the Evangelicals

The United States is noteworthy not only for the variety of its religions, but also for its high level of religiosity, which challenges the sociological theory, based on European experience, that as a society becomes more advanced, more industrial, and more technological, it will become more secular. At the time of the American Revolution about 17 percent of Americans were

churched. By the Civil War, the share had grown to 37 percent. Early in this century it was just over half, and in our own generation it is more than 60 percent—some portion of which consists of merely nominal members.

America does display a different sort of secularization, according to Finke and Stark, and others. Long-established Protestant denominations tend to become more liberal in doctrine. As they do, they give rise to splits by more sectarian followers of the older tradition, or they stagnate and leave more room for emerging sectarian competitors. Since the mid-1960s, something even more radical has happened. Rather than just slowing in growth or remaining flat, some of the major "Mainline" or "old-line" denominations have suffered new membership declines, year after year after year. The big losers—the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church—are gener-

IN JUDAISM, PERHAPS THE BIGGEST DEVELOPMENT IS THE AGING AND SHRINKING OF ITS POPULATION BASE. YOUNGER AMERICAN JEWS MARRYING GENTILES ARE NOW A MAJORITY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY.

ally long-established, predominately white and affluent, ecumenical and interfaith in spirit, affiliated with the National Council of Churches, and longtime leaders in college and seminary education. Relatively liberal in religion and politics, these groups have produced the leadership of business and politics and have long been considered the voice of Protestantism in what remains a heavily Protestant culture.

The Mainline groups' cultural role has gradually been supplanted by the upstart conservative Protestants generally known as Evangelicals. White Evangelicals outside the National Council of Churches now outnumber white Protestants within the ecumenical fold. Without understanding this great two-party split in Protestantism, one cannot understand American religion today. It is now commonplace that the differences within a denominational family are wider and more important than the differences outside. Conservative Presbyterians have more in common with conservative Lutherans today than either has with more liberal believers carrying the same denominational label. More confusing yet, the conservative Evangelical movement consists of three sectors: entire denominations (such as the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), countless independent congregations, and the conservative factions within the Mainline denominations.

The rising Evangelical coalition is divided in other ways. The dying Old Fundamentalists are those caught in the cultural

bondage of anti-Catholicism, sometimes anti-Semitism, and in the case of Bob Jones University, of racism. The New Fundamentalists are epitomized by Jerry Falwell, who moved his flock to respectability on those points while maintaining a strictly separatist and sectarian stance. Falwell has just affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, which shows how solidly right wing that denomination has become. The Evangelical

groups also include those too moderate to be called Fundamentalists, who have as their titular leader Billy Graham; the Pentecostal denominations, who teach the infilling of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues; and Charismatics, including both independent congregations and factions within Mainline groups, who follow looser forms of Pentecostal practice. Black Protestantism is evangelical in many ways

but is considered a separate tradition for the most part.

Since World War II, the sprawling and loosely organized conservative Evangelical movement has become the new establishment, the largest single religious faction in the United States. They are the innovators of American religion—in radio, television, religious movies, advertising, publishing, Christian pop and rock music, foreign mission work, seminary education, and cyberspace. Bible Belt conservatives have also shown moxie in political organizing and lobbying that far outshines that from the religious left, which cherished this field as its own for so long.

The Evangelical boom is in some ways more a story of liberal Protestant failure than conservative brilliance. As lamented by Wheaton College Professor Mark Noll in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, the Evangelicals have largely failed to create an intellectual culture with staying power over against the world views they oppose. With the exception of a handful of colleges, for example, the Evangelicals have been unable to nurture distinguished reli-

Table 1. The American Religious Landscape Today

Denomination	Number of Congregations
Southern Baptist Convention	40,565
United Methodist Church	36,361
National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.	33,000
Roman Catholic Church	22,728
Church of God in Christ	15,300
Churches of Christ	14,000
Assemblies of God	11,884
Presbyterian Church USA	11,328
C.o.J.C.o. Latter-day Saints	11,000
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	10,396
Jehovah's Witnesses	10,671
African Methodist Episcopal Church	8,000
Episcopal Church	7,415
United Church of Christ	6,110
Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod	6,099
Church of God (Tennessee)	6,060
American Baptist Churches	5,839
(Independent) Christian Churches	5,579
Church of the Nazarene	5,135
Seventh Day Adventist Church	4,363
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	3,840
United Pentecostal Church	3,790
Baptist Bible Fellowship	3,600
Jewish congregations (all denominations)	3,416

giously based liberal arts universities as did the Mainline Protestants—who invented the idea only to hand it away to secular influences.

Not Just the Protestants

The American Catholic church today is a far different church than it was in the early 1960s. From a denomination presided over by an unquestionably infallible Pope and a well-disciplined clergy with no public dissent and characterized by a venerable liturgy, recited in Latin, with weekly attendance expected of all, it has become a federation of internally divided quasi-denominations. What began in the 1960s with a seemingly modest effort of reform at the Second Vatican Council has ended with every aspect of Catholic tradition under question, and the questioners under question by a rigorous Pope and his Vatican staff. America's biggest single denomination is now a federation of fiefdoms consisting of the loyalists and the liberals, the divorced and remarried, the alienated and the indifferent, the merely ethnic or "communal Catholics" and the "cafeteria Catholics" who pick and choose what to practice. Public opinion surveys show that people who identify as Catholic are more liberal on sexual morals than Protestants as a whole. Birth rates and opinions on abortion are virtually the same. Like Protestantism, the American Catholic Church today seems to be many denominations, loosely united.

In Judaism, perhaps the biggest development is the aging and shrinking of its population base. Younger American Jews marrying Gentiles are now a majority for the first time in history. The Jewish population study of 1990 shows that children of these mixed marriages are least likely to receive a Jewish upbringing, more likely to be educated into Christianity—but most likely to receive no religious education and to carry no religious identification into adulthood. Recently we had two cries of alarm, one from Alan Dershowitz on the secular left and the other from Elliott Abrams on the religious right, saying American Judaism is

in mortal danger unless it somehow provides a new identity to the younger generation.

What About Everybody Else?

A topic of considerable controversy among experts on American religion is the number of Americans who belong to religions other than Christianity and Judaism. In 1989 and 1990 City University of New York researchers put a religious identification question on a random telephone marketing survey and got data for 113,000 U.S. households. Their estimate was that there were 527,000 Muslims, 401,000 Buddhists, and 227,000 Hindus in the United States. By contrast, the 1998 Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year puts the numbers at 3.8 million Muslims, 1.9 million Buddhists, and almost 800,000 Hindus. And needless to say, if you ask publicists for the Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists, they will give you estimates vastly bigger than the Britannica does. Two special factors affect new and immigrant faiths. First, they may lack organizational infrastructure that relates to specific religious congregations. For example, despite estimates of millions of U.S. Muslims, only a thousand or so mosques and community centers exist to serve them. And for Buddhists and Hindus, the whole idea of congregations and denominations and memberships is alien to Asian tradition.

However we count them, there is no doubt that immigrants are now, as before, gradually changing the face of American religion. President Johnson's signing of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the first major change in law since 1924, greatly facilitated entry by Asians. Buddhism and Hinduism are now firmly rooted in America, and Islam has the potential to rival or surpass Judaism as the nation's second-ranking religion if institutions and leaders to serve them can be found.

Islam faces the same challenge as Judaism with the influx from Eastern Europe toward the end of the 19th century. New-style congregations had to be invented, new buildings built, and new schools started to train a new type of

rabbi. U.S. Islam is just beginning to create the communal organizations that have served Judaism so well. There is no coherent association of mosques to unite immigrants with native-born blacks, and national organizations of other types are young. Muslims are divided the way Protestants have been, by ethnicity, race, and language. Only in 1996 did U.S. Muslims establish a school for training clergy at the graduate level to parallel the Jewish and Christian seminaries.

Another future trend to note is the large and growing minority of younger Americans who define themselves as "spiritual" but not "religious," signaling a quest that is neither limited by nor nurtured by the traditional organized religions of the past. More than any previous generation, Americans age 18 and under are thoroughly detached from traditional Christian concepts. By and large they do not believe Jesus is the unique savior of mankind, do not read the Bible as God's word, and do not accept the idea of moral absolutes. Whether one views that as progress or regress depends on one's own concepts of Christianity, reality, and the cosmos. But it is certainly another revolution in our time.

Futurists are telling us that the old ways of doing religion in America cannot last. Younger Americans have increasingly short attention spans, so that one California church changes the elements of worship every eight to ten minutes—a development that sounds the death knell of the sermon. We're told young Americans are increasingly unable to read printed material—a body blow to Protestant religion as we've known it. They say youth distrusts traditional institutions, among which the church and synagogue are the most traditional of all. Some few are pronouncing even the decline of local congregations in favor of informal house churches or cyberchurches linked only randomly by computer or totally individual behaviors.

Those who look to the churches for the salvation of civic life or for the renovation of politics should realize that organized religion will have its hands full coping with purely internal issues in the coming generation. ■

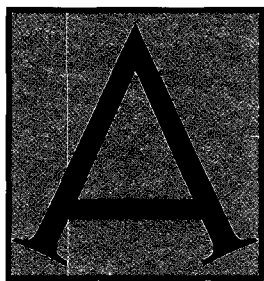
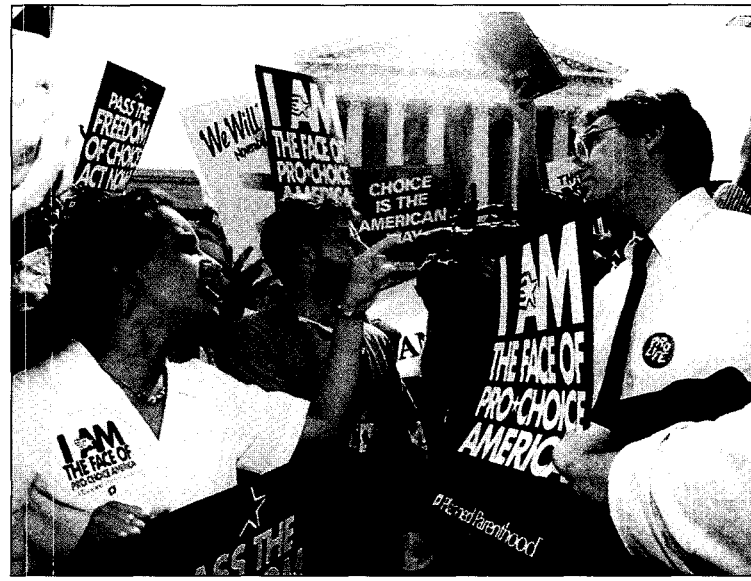
THE 60S AND

AMERICANS' POLITICAL, MORAL, AND RELIGIOUS VALUES THEN AND NOW

BY ROBERT J. BLENDON, JOHN M. BENSON, MOLLYANN BRODIE,
DREW E. ALTMAN, RICHARD MORIN, CLAUDIA DEANE, AND NINA KJELLSON



Paul Conklin/Time Magazine



As the American people sort out the second impeachment proceeding of the century, it is a good time to examine how the nation's political and moral values have changed in the past 30 years and how Democrats and Republicans differ today on some important values. Last summer and fall, we conducted three polls to look at these two issues, as well as Americans' views on religion in the public domain. We found that Americans today are generally more conservative in their views on the role of government and more concerned about the country's moral decline than they were 30 years ago.

Robert J. Blendon, of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the Harvard School of Public Health; John M. Benson, of the Harvard School of Public Health; Mollyann Brodie, Drew E. Altman, and Nina Kjellson, of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation; and Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, of the Washington Post, are part of a team conducting ongoing polling on Americans' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about domestic policy.

THE 90s

Table 1 sets out differences in Americans' values during the 1960s and today. During the 1960s only a distinct minority of Americans was distrustful of government; today two-thirds of Americans could be so categorized, trusting the government in Washington to do the right thing "only some of the time or never." The proportion of Americans who see big government—as opposed to big labor or big business—as the biggest threat to the country's future has grown from 35 percent in the 1960s to 59 percent today. Thirty years ago Americans were pretty evenly divided over whether the government should provide special help to minorities and whether it had a responsibility to reduce income differences. Today only 37 percent would like government to do more to help minorities, and only 30 percent believe government should help reduce differences in income. In fact, of the issues we tested, the only power Americans are more willing to invest in their government today than they were 30 years ago is the power to administer the death penalty for persons convicted of murder.

Americans are also more worried about moral values than they were 30 years ago. In 1952, only 34 percent of Americans thought that young people of their time did not have as strong a sense of right and wrong as young people did 50 years earlier. In 1965 fewer than half of poll respondents embraced that negative view of young Americans. But today 78 percent feel that the morals of young Americans have declined. Indeed, 71 percent believe that people in general lead less honest and moral lives than they once did.

Table 1. American Values, Then and Now

Role of Government	Then	Now (1998)
Trust government in Washington to do the right thing only some of the time or never	(1964) 23%	66%
Big government is biggest threat to the future of the country	(1965) 35%	59%
Government has gone too far in regulating business and interfering with the free enterprise system	(1964) 43%	59%
Prefer smaller government with fewer services to larger government with more/many services	(1976) 40%	59%
Would like government to do more to help minority groups	(1968) 50%	37%
(Government should/It is the responsibility of government to) reduce differences in income	(1973) 48%	30%
Favor death penalty for persons convicted of murder	(1966) 42%	69%
Morality and Toleration		
Young people today do not have as strong a sense of right and wrong as they did 50 years ago	(1965) 46%	78%
People in general today do not lead lives as honest and moral as they used to	(1965) 52%	71%
Homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities	(1977) 56%	87%
Approve of marriage between Jews and non-Jews	(1968) 59%	75%
There should not be laws against marriages between (negroes/blacks/African-Americans) and whites (response of whites)	(1963) 36%	(1996) 87%
If your party nominated well-qualified person for president who was an atheist, would vote for that person	(1958) 18%	44%

ANOTHER STRIKING CHANGE SINCE THE 1960s IS THAT AMERICANS TODAY EXPRESS MUCH MORE TOLERANT VIEWS OF DIFFERENT GROUPS IN SOCIETY.

Table 2. Role of Government Today:
Differences between Republicans and Democrats

	Republicans	Democrats
Big government is biggest threat to the future of the country	70%	47%
Government has gone too far in regulating business and interfering with the free enterprise system	72%	52%
Prefer smaller government with fewer services to larger government with many services—and feel strongly	73% 50%	47% 20%
Would like government to do more to help minority groups	23%	52%
Disagree that we have gone too far in pushing equal rights	43%	64%
Support affirmative action programs that give preference to minorities	21%	43%
It is responsibility of government to reduce differences in income	20%	39%
It is government's responsibility to improve standard of living of all Americans	38%	65%
Favor death penalty for persons convicted of murder	76%	60%

Another striking change since the 1960s is that Americans today express much more tolerant views of different groups in society. Approval of marriage between Jews and non-Jews rose from 59 percent in 1968 to 75 percent in 1998. Even more dramatically, the proportion of whites who believe there should not be laws against marriages between African Americans and whites rose from 36 percent to 87 percent. As late as 1977, not much more than half of Americans thought homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job

opportunities; today 87 percent support equal job opportunities. Americans have also become more tolerant of atheists. Though a majority are still unwilling to vote for an atheist for president, the share that is willing to do so increased from 18 percent in 1958 to 44 percent today.

Partisan Differences

Republicans are clearly the party of limited government, though close to half of Democrats polled (see table 2) are also skeptical of “big govern-

ment.” Considerably more Democrats than Republicans are favorably inclined toward specific government programs, such as aid to minorities and support for equal rights. Twice as many Democrats as Republicans (though still a minority of Democrats) support affirmative action. Far more Democrats than Republicans (but, again, still a minority of Democrats) believe government should reduce differences in income; a strong majority of Democrats (compared with only 38 percent of Republicans) believes it is the government's responsibility to improve the living standard of all Americans.

When the issues become focused on morality and toleration, other discrepancies between the parties arise (table 3). Although strong majorities in both parties see morality in America on the decline and are tolerant of different *groups* in our society, Republicans are substantially less tolerant of certain *behaviors* than are Democrats. Three behaviors in particular divide Republicans and Democrats: having a child without being married, having sexual relations before marriage, and having an abortion. In each case a majority of Republicans finds the behavior unacceptable, while a majority of Democrats believe it is acceptable. A small minority of both parties (31 percent of Democrats, 16 percent of Republicans) approves of sex between two adults of the same sex. The two parties also agree that divorce should be harder to obtain.

The role of the president in setting a moral example sharply splits the parties. The long-running controversy over President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky is undoubtedly part of the reason for the divide, but the

Table 3. Morality, Toleration, and Religion in the Public Domain Today: Differences between Republicans and Democrats

	Republicans	Democrats
BELIEF THAT MORALITY IS DECLINING		
Young people today do not have as strong a sense of right and wrong as they did 50 years ago	80%	75%
People in general today do not lead lives as honest and moral as they used to	78%	68%
Values and moral beliefs in this country have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track	83%	65%
TOLERATION OF GROUPS IN SOCIETY		
Homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities	84%	88%
Approve of marriage between Jews and non-Jews	75%	77%
There should not be laws against marriages between (blacks/African-Americans) and whites	86%	85%
If your party nominated well-qualified person for president who was an atheist, would vote for that person	35%	41%
TOLERATION OF BEHAVIORS		
Agree strongly that Americans are too tolerant and accepting of behaviors that in the past were considered immoral or wrong	55%	34%
Agree that the world is changing and we need to adjust our morals	33%	50%
<i>Is acceptable behavior...</i>		
Having a child without being married	47%	62%
Having sex before marriage	45%	60%
Having an abortion	42%	56%
Sex between two adults of the same sex	16%	31%
Disagree that divorce should be harder to obtain	24%	41%
PRESIDENT AS MORAL EXAMPLE		
The president has a greater responsibility than leaders of other organizations to set an example with his personal life	69%	26%
SUPPORT FOR RELIGION IN PUBLIC DOMAIN		
Would like to see religious and spiritual values have a greater influence in politics and public life	48%	36%
It is important for organized religious groups to stand up for their beliefs in politics	61%	49%
It is sometimes right for clergymen to discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit	40%	29%
Government should take specific steps to protect America's religious heritage	55%	46%
Religious people must take political action to protect their rights	63%	55%

partisan positions are generally in tune with attitudes expressed on other issues of moral behavior.

Republicans express stronger support than Democrats for religion in the public domain. Forty-eight percent of Republicans, but only 36 percent of Democrats, would like to see religious and spiritual values have a greater influence in politics and public life. A majority of both parties (63 percent of Republicans, 55 percent of Democrats) believe that religious people must take political action to protect their rights; 61 percent of Republicans and 49 percent of Democrats believe it is important for organized religious groups to stand up for their beliefs in politics; and 55 percent of Republicans and 46 percent of Democrats believe government should take specific steps to protect America's religious heritage. Minorities of both parties (40 percent of Republicans, 29 percent of Democrats) think it is sometimes right for clergymen to discuss political candidates or issues from the pulpit. ■

Polls Used

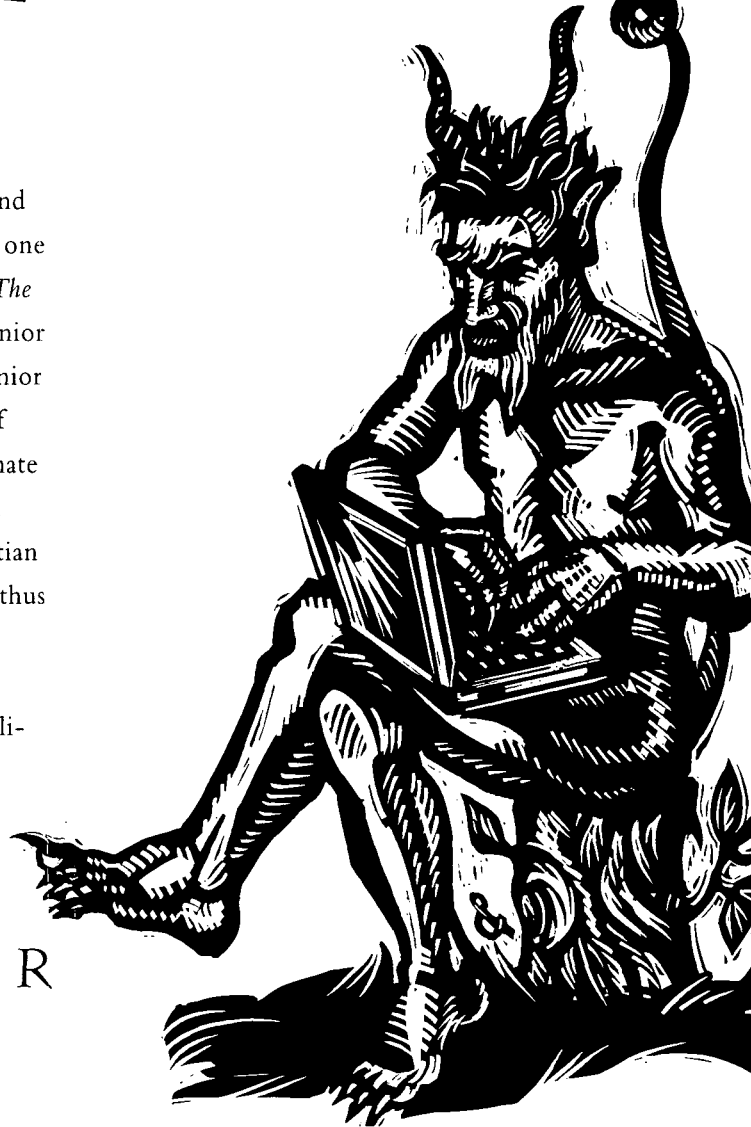
The current results reported here are drawn from three polls in a special series conducted by the *Washington Post*/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University survey project, July 29–August 18, 1998; August 10–27, 1998, and November 13–17, 1998. Other data come from polls by Ben Gaffin and Associates (1952); the Gallup Poll (1958, 1965, 1966, 1968, 1977); Gallup/Potomac Associates (1964); the National Election Survey (1964); Gallup/*Catholic Digest* (1965); Trendex/General Electric (1968); the National Opinion Research Center (1963, 1973, 1996); and CBS News/*New York Times* (1976). Results of all polls cited may be obtained from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, Storrs, Connecticut.

The work of analyzing the polls was supported by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The views expressed are solely those of the authors, and no official endorsement by the Kaiser Family Foundation is intended or should be inferred.

SCREWTAPE LETTER

What a Senior Devil Might Think about Religion and Politics

IN 1942 the Christian writer and Oxford don C. S. Lewis wrote one of his most influential books, *The Screwtape Letters*, in which a senior devil, Screwtape, instructs a junior devil, Wormwood, in the art of temptation. Lewis's intent was to illuminate matters having to do with faith, life, and human folly by writing about the Christian faith from the perspective of the Devil (thus God is spoken of as "the Enemy"). This essay contemplates what both Professor Lewis and Screwtape might say about religion and politics in our time.



BY PETER WEHNER

Peter Wehner is executive director for policy, Empower America.

MY DEAR WORMWOOD,

I AM RECRUITING YOU to do our work in a target-rich environment: politics. It is true that the Enemy has sometimes used politics to advance what He foolishly cares about—things like “justice” and “human dignity,” “righteousness” and “mercy.” But the good news for us is that being actively involved in politics without being seduced by it can be difficult—and human folly and egoism strongly work in our favor. As long as your patients remain oblivious to the snares of worldliness, they become unwitting instruments in our cause.

As you surely know by now, one of the best ways to undermine Christian faith and good works is to act insidiously. Avoid a direct assault on faith; it gives the Enemy’s followers time to prepare for the assault and respond. If we succeed in directly planting doubt in the mind of believers, they often go to their knees in prayer, humbly asking the Enemy for strength. When that happens we have lost them. A better strategy is to cloud reality. Keep Christians from realizing what is involved. We want them to think they’re doing the work of the Enemy while they are in fact advancing *our* ends. This approach is much more effective—and much more amusing to watch.

The following methods are ones I have found to be particularly useful.

1. Rely on omissions, distortions, and outright lies.

These are among the sharpest arrows in our quiver. The key is to disfigure the original meaning and context of the Enemy’s play book (they refer to it as the “Bible”). Here are some historical facts that you must continually obscure. First, Christ (the son of the Enemy) and His disciples were profoundly mistrustful of power, and His earthly ministry was directed against the pretensions of earthly power. He came to the world as a lowly servant and never became a political leader. In worldly terms, His disciples had no status or influence, and neither Christ nor His disciples led a political movement of any kind. Indeed, their most sacred symbol, the cross, is an emblem of agony and humiliation that is the antithesis of worldly power and victory. From our perspective it is just as well for Christians to acknowledge these things without taking them seriously. Let them pay lip service, for nominal faith is as good as no faith at all. Your task is to so thoroughly twist your patients’ understanding of Christ’s kingdom that they actually come to believe that by forming coalitions, networking among the politically powerful, writing laws to advance His “social agenda,” and securing “a place at the table,” they are following in His footsteps.

2. **Promote ugly division among believers.** One reason why politics is such rich ground for us is that it breeds acrimonious debate among followers of the Enemy. As you know by now, politics often inflames human emotions like anger, bitterness, resentment. What could be better for our cause than getting followers of the Enemy on different sides of an issue? What great fun it is to watch them spit venom! Can you imagine my joy when one prominent religious-political figure—he even has the title “Reverend”—accused fellow believers with whom he has political disagreements of being a strong force in Nazi Germany! We must always discourage reasoned and civil debate since it can eventually be turned against us and become an instrument for ascertaining “truth.” What we are after is argument by invective (preferably accompanied by sloppy reasoning).

Christians will deny it, of course, but behind closed doors and in the privacy of their own political offices, on telephone lines, and in “off the record” comments, these “brothers” in the faith will savage one another. Sometimes they do it even when they’re on the same side of an issue! These clanging cymbals not only make for great fun—they do our work for us. Their hypocrisy makes the “unbelievers” whom the Enemy is trying to win over wary and cynical. So long as political passions undermine such contemptible “virtues” as love, humility, forgiveness, forbearance, kindness, and mercy, we have accomplished our goals.

3. **Take advantage of the messianic illusion.** What you want Christians to believe is that their work is absolutely necessary if the Enemy is to accomplish His goals on earth. Make them think they are indispensable. Do you see why this is so important? Because if Christians believe everything depends on them, they will develop an aggressive, anxious, even desperate spirit. They will show little grace toward others. They will begin to believe that only they and a few of their kind are strong enough to resist “compromise.” And they will disdain fellow believers who do not share their zeal for their cause. The most delicious quarry are those Christians who believe that at stake in their work is nothing less than the influence of Christianity in America. They actually believe Christ depends on them instead of the other way around—which is the surest road to vainglory.

4. Rely on worldliness. Although the Christian church has often thrived under persecution, it has been corrupted virtually every time it seizes power or becomes closely aligned with power. The reason, of course, is that more often than not Christians in positions of worldly authority don't transform the world; they are conformed to it. You would think that by now this would be widely understood. Thankfully, it isn't. Here, then, is the dirty little secret we must keep confidential, lest the followers of the Enemy learn from it: religious leaders are easily seduced by political power. Allow these shameless namedroppers access to worldly power and they make sure *everybody* knows about it. For all their rants against worldliness, they are like children with their faces pressed against a toy store window, longing to get in. That's their Achilles heel.

One particularly troublesome Christian once wrote that he was a proud member of a political movement. He rationalized that surely the Enemy must approve what he was doing since he was (in this instance) opposing an unjust war. Except that the political movement, whatever its ideals, did a good deal of *hating*. Christ became subordinate to movement goals. That is exactly what we want to see happen. So we must continue to press the point that religion ought to be an instrument of political ideology. A means to an end. If we succeed in getting Christian witness sacrificed at the altar of politics, we win—regardless of the merits of the particular political issue. I'm willing to lose a vote on H.R. 666 to win souls.

5. Lack of theological integrity. Many Christians explain their involvement in politics as a way to advance the Enemy's agenda in the public arena, and they begin with good intentions. How should we respond? Our goal is to get them to bend the Bible to conform to their political predispositions, so that their political agenda (pursued in the name of Christ) has little or no relation to what He says. I call it cafeteria-style theology, in which His followers arbitrarily pick and choose the issues they care about. As you'll see, this works wonders.

Let me give you a specific example. The Enemy's "New Testament" play book says a staggering amount about riches, more than about almost any other subject. What is said is almost always in the nature of a warning. The reason, of course, is that the Enemy knows the damage we can do to His followers through riches: the danger they pose to one's soul, the pull of worldliness, the corruption of affections. What I most detest, and what I most fear, are earnest followers who take the Enemy's words to heart, who meditate on them, and worst of all, who act on them. Those people are a lost cause.

But don't despair. There are plenty of others. For them, our aim is to obscure the real appeal of their faith—its absolute otherness. We must patiently erase the realization that the Enemy has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong; that His power is made perfect in weakness; that they must die to live; that the meek and not the strong shall inherit the earth; that they are called to be servants and not masters;

and that they are called to love and not hate their enemies.

How do we avert their attention from warnings the Enemy has put in bright neon light? Remind them of the weight of the Enemy's demands. Whisper in their ear that these precepts should not be taken literally. Have them strive for "relevance" instead of faithfulness. Encourage them to reinterpret the words of Christ. Once you've done all that you can, watch while those who insist that the words of Christ ought to be a guide to political action become silent on issues of such obvious concern to Him, and speak out on issues He cares little or nothing about. It's bad for them, and it's bad for their witness. But it's good, very good, for us.



Close by reminding you of a crucial distinction. Getting followers of the Enemy involved in politics is not enough; it can even redound to His glory (I am thinking here of contemptible figures like William Wilberforce and his efforts to end British slave trade). No, what we have to do is coax them into a cul-de-sac of human ego, blind hubris, love of power. Once they become involved in politics, we want to corrupt them—but it is best to do it a little at a time. Do I need to explain why patience will be rewarded? Surely you are familiar with the "frog's dilemma." If you drop a frog in boiling water it will jump out, but if you heat the water slowly, the frog will adjust and accommodate itself to the new temperature—until it finally burns to death. We want to turn up the temperature of political activism slowly but steadily. Surely you have learned enough by now to agree with me that the best sport is to take a bad thing (carefully thinking through the social implications of faith) and turn it into a good thing (political idolatry).

Finally, to anticipate the Enemy's strategy, we must consider His aims. What He cares about are all those things for which we have utter contempt: good works, purity of heart, a joyful spirit, grace, the habit of obedience even during moments of doubt, winning converts by practical demonstrations of love (remember, we want to encourage *abstract* pronouncements of love and compassion; our undoing is when Christians demonstrate *real* love and compassion for people in need). The Enemy always does terrible damage to us when His followers believe deep in their hearts that they are citizens of heaven and not of earth. It is then, paradoxically, that they do the most good here on earth, both within and beyond politics. Do not let this old Christian truth be revealed, my dear Wormwood, or else we're finished.

Your affectionate uncle,

SCREWTAPE

FIRST FROM TROMBONE

BY TAYLOR BRANCH

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AP/Wide World Photos

Late in the afternoon of Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat on a public city bus to a white passenger. Over the weekend, leaders of the black community organized a bus boycott to begin on Monday morning. On Monday afternoon, December 5, Martin Luther King, Jr., the young pastor of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, was chosen to lead the ongoing boycott and to speak at a mass meeting that evening at the Holt Street Baptist Church. King had less than half an hour to prepare his first political address.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Holt Street Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, December 5, 1955

*Take him, Lord—this morning—
Wash him with hyssop inside and out,
Hang him up and drain him dry of sin. . . .
Fill him full of the dynamite of thy power,
Anoint him all over with the oil of thy salvation
And set his tongue on fire.*

James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones*



King stood silently for a moment. When he greeted the enormous crowd of strangers, who were packed in the balconies and aisles, peering in through the windows and upward from seats on the floor, he spoke in a deep voice, stressing his diction in a slow introductory cadence. “We are here this evening—for serious business,” he said, in even pulses, rising and then falling in pitch. When he paused, only one or two “yes” responses came up from the crowd, and they were quiet ones. It was a throng of shouters, he could see, but they were waiting to see where he would take them. “We are here in a general sense, because first and foremost—we are American citizens—and we are determined to apply our citizenship—to the fullness of its means,” he said. “But we are here in a specific sense—because of the bus situation in Montgomery.” A general murmur of assent came back to him, and the pitch of King’s voice rose gradually through short, quickened sentences. “The situation is not at all new. The problem has existed over endless years. Just the other day—just last Thursday to be exact—one of the finest citizens in Montgomery—not one of the finest Negro citizens—but one of the finest citizens in Montgomery—was taken from a bus—and carried to jail and arrested—because she refused to give up—to give her seat to a white person.”

The crowd punctuated each pause with scattered “Yeses” and “Amens.” They were with him in rhythm, but lagged slightly behind in enthusiasm. Then King spoke of the law, saying that the arrest was doubtful even under the segregation ordinances, because reserved Negro and white bus sections were not specified in them. “The law has never been clarified at that point,” he said, drawing an emphatic “Hell, no” from one man in his audience. “And I think I speak with—with legal authority—not that I have any legal authority—but I think I speak with legal authority behind me—that the law—the ordinance—the city ordinance has never been totally clarified.” This sentence marked King as a speaker who took care with distinctions, but it took the crowd nowhere. King returned to the special nature of Rosa Parks. “And since it had to happen, I’m happy it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks,” he said, “for nobody can doubt the boundless outreach of her integrity. Nobody can doubt the height of her character, nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment.” That’s right, a soft chorus answered. “And just because she refused to get up, she was arrested,” King repeated. The crowd was stirring now, following King at the speed of a medium walk.

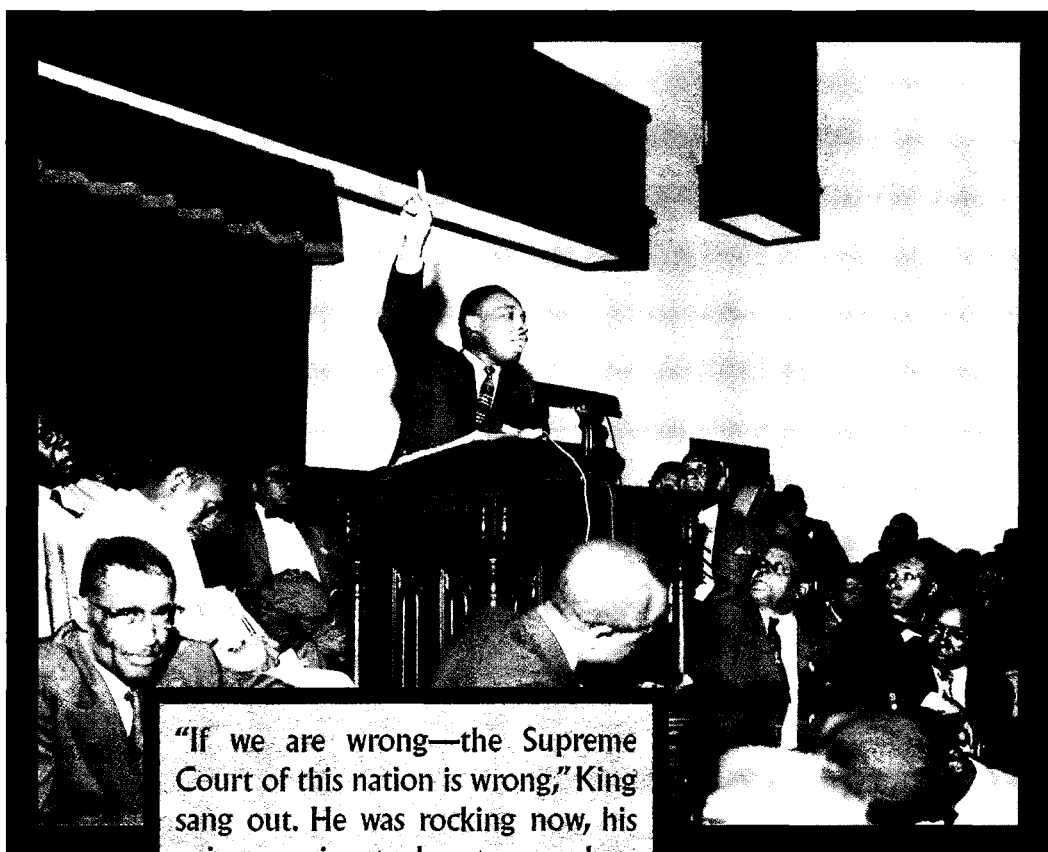
He paused slightly longer. “And you know, my friends, there comes a time,” he cried, “when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.” A flock of “Yeses” was coming back at him when suddenly the individual responses dissolved into a rising cheer and applause exploded beneath the cheer—all within the space of a second. The startling noise rolled on and on, like a wave that refused to break, and just when it seemed that the roar must finally weaken, a wall of sound came in from the enormous crowd outdoors to push the volume still higher. Thunder seemed to be added to the lower register—the sound of feet stomping on the wooden floor—until the loudness became something that was not so much heard as it was sensed by vibrations in the lungs. The giant cloud of noise shook the building and refused to go away. One sentence had set it loose somehow, pushing the call-and-response of the Negro church service past the din of a political rally and on to something else that King had never known before. There was a rabbit of awesome proportions in those bushes. As the noise finally fell back, King’s voice rose above it to fire again. “There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being thrown across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair,” he declared. “There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life’s July, and left standing amidst the piercing chill of an Alpine November. There . . .” King was making a new run, but the crowd drowned him out. No one could tell whether the roar came in response to the nerve he had touched, or simply out of pride in a speaker from whose tongue such rhetoric rolled so easily. “We are here—we are here because we are tired now,” King repeated.

Perhaps daunted by the power that was bursting forth from the crowd, King moved quickly to address the pitfalls of a boycott. “Now let us say that we are not here advocating violence,” he said. “We have overcome that.” A man in the crowd shouted, “Repeat that! Repeat that!” “I want it to be known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation that we are Christian people,” said King, putting three distinct syllables in “Christian.” “The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest.” There was a crisp shout of approval right on the beat of King’s pause. He and the audience moved into a slow trot. “If we were incarcerated behind the iron curtains of a communistic nation—we couldn’t do this. If we were trapped in the dungeon of a totalitarian regime—we couldn’t do this. But the great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right.” When the shouts of approval died down, King rose up with his final reason to avoid violence, which was to distinguish themselves from their opponents in the Klan and the White Citizens Council. “There will be no crosses burned at any bus stops in Montgomery,” he said. “There will be no white persons pulled out of their homes and taken out on some distant road and murdered. There will be nobody among us who will stand up and defy the Constitution of this nation.”

King paused. The church was quiet but it was humming. “My friends,” he said slowly, “I want it to be known—that we’re going to work with grim and bold determination—to

gain justice on the buses in this city. And we are not wrong. We are not wrong in what we are doing." There was a muffled shout of anticipation, as the crowd sensed that King was moving closer to the heart of his cause. "If we are wrong—the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong," King sang out. He was rocking now, his voice seeming to be at once deep and high pitched. "If we are wrong—God Almighty is wrong!" he shouted, and the crowd seemed to explode a second time, as it had done when he said they were tired. Wave after wave of noise broke over them, cresting into the farthest reaches of the ceiling. They were far beyond Rosa Parks or the bus laws. King's last cry had fused blasphemy to the edge of his faith and the heart of theirs. The noise swelled until King cut through it to move past a point of unbearable tension. "If we are wrong—Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer and never came down to earth! If we are wrong—justice is a lie." This was too much. He had to wait some time before delivering his soaring conclusion, in a flight of anger mixed with rapture: "And we are determined here in Montgomery—to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream!" The audience all but smothered this passage from Amos, the lowly herdsman prophet of Israel who, along with the priestly Isaiah, was King's favorite biblical authority on justice.

He backed off the emotion to speak of the need for unity, the dignity of protest, the historical precedent of the labor movement. Comparatively speaking, his subject matter was mundane, but the crowd stayed with him even through paraphrases of abstruse points from Niebuhr. "And I want to tell you this evening that it is not enough for us to talk about love," he said. "Love is one of the pinnacle parts of the Christian faith. There is another side called justice. And justice is really love in calculation. Justice is love correcting that which would work against love." He said that God was not just the God of love: "He's also the God that standeth before the nations and says, 'Be still and know that I am God—and if you don't obey Me I'm gonna break the backbone of your power—and cast you out of the arms of your international and national relationships.'" Shouts and claps continued at a steady rhythm as King's



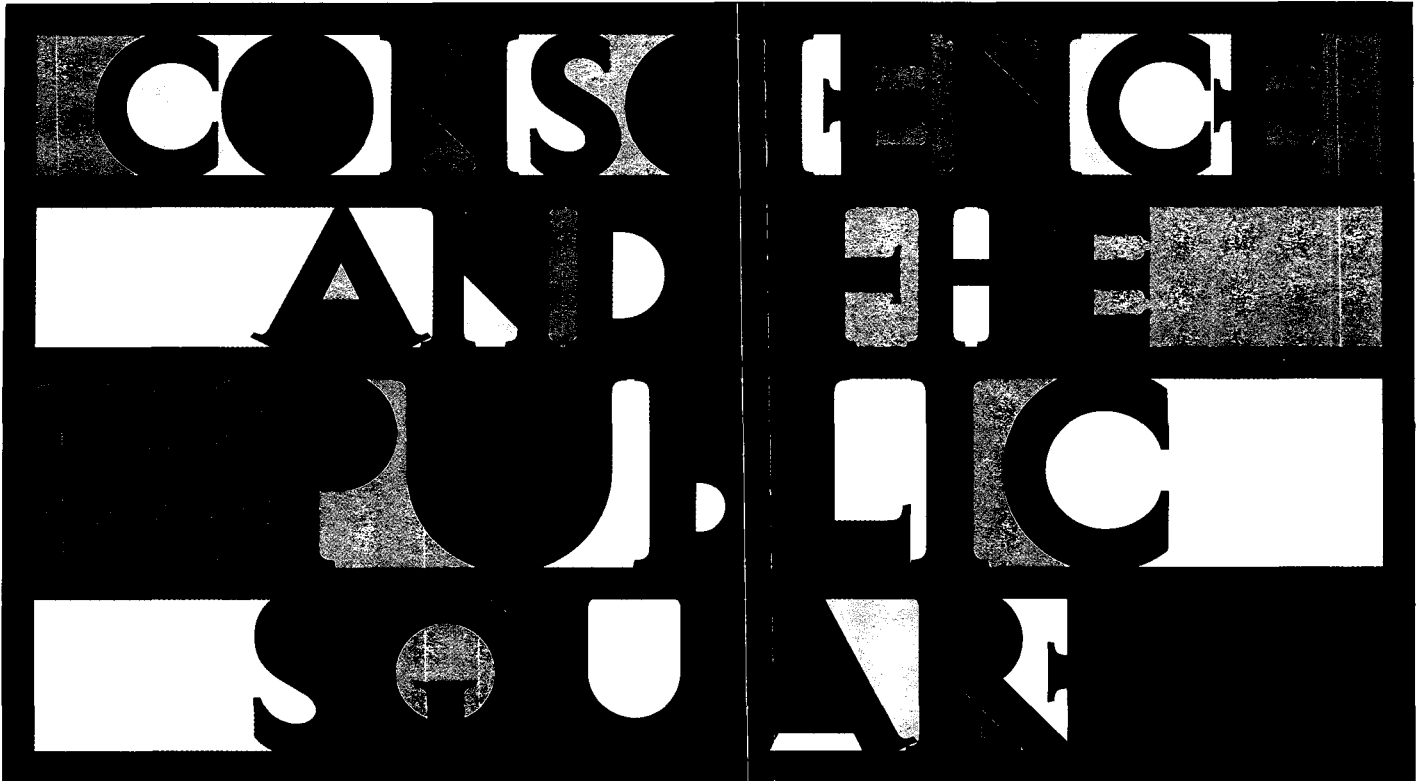
"If we are wrong—the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong," King sang out. He was rocking now, his voice seeming to be at once deep and high pitched. "If we are wrong—God Almighty is wrong!"

audacity overflowed. "Standing beside love is always justice," he said. "Not only are we using the tools of persuasion—but we've

got to use the tools of coercion." He called again for unity. For working together. He appealed to history, summoning his listeners to behave so that sages of the future would look back at the Negroes of Montgomery and say they were "a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights." He said they could do that. "God grant that we will do it before it's too late." Someone said, "Oh, yes." And King said, "As we proceed with our program—let us think on these things."

The crowd retreated into stunned silence as he stepped away from the pulpit. The ending was so abrupt, so anticlimactic. The crowd had been waiting for him to reach for the heights a third time at this conclusion, following the rules of oratory. A few seconds passed before memory and spirit overtook disappointment. The applause continued as King made his way out of the church, with people reaching out to touch him. Dexter members marveled, having never seen King let loose like that. [Ralph] Abernathy remained behind, reading negotiating demands from the pulpit. The boycott was on. King would work on his timing, but his oratory had just made him forever a public person. In the few short minutes of his first political address, a power of communion emerged from him that would speak inexorably to strangers who would both love and revile him, like all prophets. He was twenty-six, and had not quite twelve years and four months to live. ■

AP/Wide World Photos



DURING 1998—ever to be remembered as the year of the Clinton sex-and-lies scandal—not once did my wife and I hear a reference to Mr. Clinton’s troubles from the pulpit of our Catholic Church in Olney, Maryland. Our experience in this suburban Catholic parish less than an hour’s drive from the nation’s capital provided an interesting prism through which to view the relation of religion to politics in America. The attitudes toward politics and religion among the priests and the people at St. Peter’s seemed different from, and perhaps healthier than, the views now so prevalent in the national debate. BY PATRICK GLYNN

Of course, many ministers and priests across the country, even some Catholic ones, delivered sermons on the Clinton matter. At one point, Cardinal O'Connor of New York uttered critical words on the president's conduct from the pulpit of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Washington's Cardinal Hickey was more oblique. In one of his monthly letters to his flock, he pictured "sin" as having "hired an unscrupulous public relations firm to improve its image," employing clever public spokesmen and "the wizardry of modern technology" to "glorify lying, cheating, stealing, marital infidelity, and even murder."

Nonetheless, for the most part, the Washington archdiocese, and certainly our parish, seemed to cleave to an age-old Catholic tradition in America. Except on very few political issues with clear-cut moral and doctrinal relevance—today abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty are foremost among them—the Catholic clergy, especially the rank-and-file, parish-based clergy, tends to maintain silence, leaving political decisions to the private consciences of parishioners.

Quietness of Heart

Did I regret our priests' reticence on this issue of national moment? In the end, no. At first I wondered about it. The Clinton matter, after all, raised not just political but significant moral concerns. But as I looked out on our suburban, middle-class congregation—brimming with young children—I could not imagine how our priests could raise the Lewinsky issue from the pulpit without making parents squirm in their pews. Moreover, comment on the scandal would have divided parishioners along political lines (this was, after all, predominantly Democratic Montgomery County, where political feelings on all sides tend to run strong).

Perhaps more to the point, for somebody who had spent entirely too many hours in 1998 watching talking heads on MSNBC and feeling outrage at the president and his defenders, the reprieve from "all Lewinsky, all the time" came as something of a relief.

Patrick Glynn, associate director of the George Washington University Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies, is the author of God: The Evidence.

Not only was the regular Sunday reprieve from the Clinton controversy welcome; it was also, I began to sense, necessary, as a prerequisite for spiritual health. Worship demands quietness of heart. "Be still, and know that I am God," says the Psalm. Much of the Catholic Mass is aimed at helping the soul to disengage from worldly cares, emotions, and sins in preparation for reception of the Eucharist, the body of Christ. Toward the end of this preparation, the congregation engages in the "sign of peace," in which the priest prays for the peace of Christ and worshippers offer a sign of peace, usually a handshake, to one another. It is this peace of Christ that we are exhorted to accept into our hearts during worship and then carry back out into our daily lives. As fallen human beings, all of us know how elusive this peace can be. One certainly does not find it in the political realm.

The Soul in Strife

Politics is not a spiritual activity. Indeed, it is among the least spiritual of activities, because it involves the soul in strife. Not that it is wrong; it is a vocation like any other. Nations need politics and politicians, and my own belief is that our nation is best served by having politicians who are themselves moral, upright, and genuinely religious, in whatever tradition. Moreover, strife, political and otherwise, is an unavoidable feature of earthly life. But the beginning of wisdom on the question of religion and politics—as St. Augustine knew—is the recognition that the two activities are antithetical in nature. Politics, based on self-love, engages and usually inflates the ego; religion, based on love of God, demands that we overcome it.

Jesus seemed unimpressed by the political sphere, almost contemptuous of it. When others attempted to draw him into the major political conflicts of his day, he resisted. Asked whether Jews should pay taxes to the Roman Empire—certainly a "hot-button" issue—he requested a coin and then inquired whose image was on it. Caesar's, came the reply. "Render therefore unto Caesar what is Caesar's," he said, "and to God what is God's." St. Paul's political advice to the early Church was essentially the same: it consisted largely in exhorting Christians to be law-abiding citizens and to

respect temporal rulers as having been put in place by God. There was a great concern—first on the part of Jesus, later his apostle Paul—to prevent Christianity from becoming a merely political movement.

A too direct coupling of religion and politics in the public square is usually pernicious, not only for politics, but also for religion itself. The result is typically not the sanctification of politics, but politicization of religion. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church left behind long years of persecution but also lost some of its original innocence in its new collaboration with the state. Indeed, the great scandals of Christian history have always been political scandals, stemming from the Church's use and abuse of temporal power.

Does God Take Sides?

Closer to home, no one could fail to notice how little help religion and religious language provided in sorting out the Clinton mess. At first, the matter of Clinton's lies and misdeeds seemed tailor-made for the religious right, who jumped all over the issue. But soon Carole Shields of People for the American Way took to the airwaves announcing that she was the daughter of a Baptist preacher and urging the nation to ignore the president's misconduct and "move on." Once the Right had draped its political views in the mantle of Christianity, the Left was impelled to do the same.

The day before the impeachment vote in the House of Representatives, the president's own rather visible Methodist minister, J. Philip Wogaman, was on radio and television reminding us that Jesus preached "forgiveness." The political relevance of this lofty observation was hard to discern. Yes, Jesus loves the driver who speeds 20 miles over the limit, and ultimately, one hopes, forgives him, even if He would prefer that the driver would behave himself. But does Jesus mean for us to let the speeder out of the traffic fines? Jesus, we are taught, can forgive murderers and child-molesters, and exhorts us too to forgive such people. But that does not relieve society of the necessity, or the duty, to define such acts as crimes and punish them accordingly.

The longer the debate went on, the more it seemed to me that the Clinton

issue was best viewed through the purely secular lens of politics, law, and constitutionality. In this I am sure I am not alone. By the end of the president's virtuoso performance at September's National Prayer Breakfast—in which he concluded a lengthy and lugubrious confession of various “sins” with an angry pledge that his lawyers would fight the charges to the end—I am sure there were many Christian conservatives who were ready to rebuild the much-maligned “wall of separation” between church and state brick by brick.

Both sides in the House impeachment debate prominently invoked the name of God. Did God take sides in this great controversy? It would be presumptuous to assume so. God is not a sociologist, much less a pundit. We think in terms of collectivities and opinion polls. We, especially those of us involved in politics or public policy, attach great importance to the goings-on in the White House or on Capitol Hill. God—the Bible is very clear on this—does not see the world quite the way we do. Where we see collectivities and poll numbers, God sees individual hearts, their inmost thoughts and intentions. What we judge to be of great importance from our perspective in the earthly city—an impeachment debate, for example—may not have quite the same importance from the standpoint of the city of God.

We focus on collectivities, while God works one soul at a time. In this way He manages to bring about large results by means that are often invisible to us. A Roman pundit, circa 30 AD, would have certainly regarded the execution of a certain charismatic religious leader in Jerusalem as a politically marginal occurrence, a virtual non-event. He would have had no idea that within 300 years, this event and its aftermath would transform the Roman Empire beyond recognition.

The Individual Conscience

Religion does its real work in politics not by arousing moral indignation, but by awakening the individual conscience. The distinction is a subtle but important one. Moral indignation drives us to condemn others; conscience prompts us to question ourselves. The great leaps of progress

in Western politics have come from an awakening of conscience. Indeed, viewed in the perspective of two millennia, the story of Western politics has been a tale of the progressive awakening of conscience, the application of an ever more exacting, humane, and—dare we say it?—Christian moral standard to political life.

As Augustine observed, the “earthly city” and the “city of God,” politics and religion, are separate and exist in opposition to each other. But the vision of the city of God has functioned as a kind of standing critique of the earthly city. And gradually, through the stepwise work of reason, the Western conscience has sought to bring life in the earthly city more in line with values of the heavenly city, and continues to do so.

In large measure, the society we have attempted to fashion in modern liberal democracies—a society, for example, that debates the impeachment of a leader based on offenses growing out of a sexual harassment lawsuit—is underpinned by values first set forth definitively in the New Testament. The notion of the God-given equal dignity and freedom of every individual human being—regardless of class, gender, race, or ethnic group—first appeared full-blown in the earliest Christian communities, some of which were not only unprecedentedly egalitarian but also unprecedentedly multiethnic in character. Amid the rigid social hierarchical and exclusionary religious and cultural taboos of the ancient world, Christianity offered a gentler, more radically egalitarian, and more multiethnic or colorblind view of the human being. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female,” wrote Paul to the Galatians, “for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In the long run, Western history has been the tale of the gradual incorporation of this vision into politics—not by violent revolution but by a slow process of inward transformation.

The evolution of the Christian attitude to slavery illustrates the point. Augustine, like Paul, believed slavery to be a purely political matter and therefore of no concern for Christians. But Augustine was clearly embarrassed that some Christians held slaves and sought to

defend their practice on grounds that Christian slave holders treated slaves more humanely, more like family.

Later, when conditions changed, and slavery no longer played a functional or in any sense necessary role in increasingly industrial economies, the Christian world's “bad conscience” about slavery translated into action. The 19th-century antislavery movement (like, to a somewhat lesser extent, the 20th-century civil rights movement) was religiously inspired, but worked largely by appealing to the conscience of society, a conscience shaped by the vision of the city of God. Not that anger and indignation were absent from the debates over slavery and segregation: in America the division over slavery led to war. But leaders such as William Wilberforce, who spearheaded the peaceful British antislavery campaign, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who shepherded the nonviolent civil rights movement, self-consciously appealed to the consciences of their fellow citizens. Progress ultimately came less from external political conflict than from inward moral transformation, from human beings finally admitting to themselves that slavery and, later, racial discrimination were wrong. The gulf between social practice and Christian principle was finally understood to be intolerable.

America's Moral Advance

We have in recent years taken this vision of a free, equal, and tolerant society to new heights. Those who complain of pervasive moral decline in American society over the past generation often overlook an astonishing moral advance. We have gone farther than the human race has ever gone toward fashioning a society that guarantees, in practice as well as principle, the equal dignity of individuals regardless of race, class, creed, gender, or ethnic origin. There are still imperfections, still racisms, still tensions. But in all it is a remarkable transformation. I grew up in Chicago, once designated the most racially segregated city in the nation. Today I live in a multiracial, multiethnic middle-class neighborhood in Silver Spring, Maryland, where people of all colors and backgrounds are on mostly easy terms.

Human beings rarely get things quite right, and it is arguable that Americans have pushed the notion of tolerance too far. The public's response to the Clinton crisis is widely taken, by conservatives at least, as evidence of this fact. But the public's response to the Clinton matter is hopelessly entangled with other political feelings and ideas. And political assessments, as I have tried to suggest, often provide a terribly superficial guide to what is really taking place in society's soul. The signs are plenty that the tendency toward indiscriminate relativism and "nonjudgmentalism"—so ably documented by Alan Wolfe—is already self-correcting. For nearly a decade, Western thinkers, ranging from Michael Sandel and Amitai Etzioni to the Pope, have been advancing a critique of "unbounded autonomy" or the "unencumbered self." More significantly, a rediscovery of religion and ethics is taking place at the individual level. To some degree, social statistics reflect this trend: Etzioni called attention some years ago to the "curl back" in the various leading social indicators—crime, teen pregnancy, and so forth, all of which continue their dramatic decline. But the most impressive reports come from the field, from religious leaders who see changes in individual lives. Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, for example, is convinced that a revival is under way, as is evangelist Steven Arterburn. Religion is reentering American life, not so much via the public square as through the back door, via the individual conscience. Individuals are rediscovering religion experientially, almost pragmatically, as the best solution to the real quandaries posed by modern life. I can see these forces at work at St. Peter's in Olney—which boasts a huge, enthusiastic congregation, a vibrant youth group, and a degree of spirituality, on the part of both priests and lay people, that was rare in the Catholicism of my youth. That's where the real action is, and that is what will shape the America of the future. I have little doubt my fellow parishioners were capable of drawing the right moral lesson from the Clinton scandal for themselves and their children, without a sermon or an official statement from the Church. ■

BY STACI SIMMONS

"WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" may be the trendiest slogan among Christian youth in America. Its acronym, "WWJD?," adorns jewelry, clothing, coffee mugs, key chains, and school supplies, even a CD under the contemporary Christian music label of EMI. The original manufacturer of the inexpensive nylon bracelets that kicked off the pop-culture fashion has sold over 17 million of the bracelets alone.

This marketing boom began in 1997. Yet the WWJD? concept springs from an 1896 novel by Charles Sheldon entitled *In His Steps*, a book that has been translated into 45 languages and has never been out of print. It portrays an ordinary city at the turn of the century in an America replete with inner-city slums, rampant homelessness, and a complex system of social and economic hierarchy.

The respectable citizens in Sheldon's novel attend church each Sunday morning. They also ignore the social ills around them. The comfortable weekly routine of the faithful continues until, at the close of a sermon on following Jesus' example, a homeless man makes his way to the front of the congregation. Standing before the mortified congregants, many of whom had turned down his pleas for a paying job, the man asks what it means to imitate Jesus. He wonders out loud about the connection between the words preached, the hymns sung, and his own experience with those who sit before him. He speaks of the world that might be born if Christians were to live out the words they speak each Sunday morning. But before he can finish, the man collapses and dies.

So shaken are the fictional congregants and their minister that a large group pledges to live a full year asking themselves "what would Jesus do?" in the everyday situations of life. The group agrees to be guided solely by principles rooted in personal interpretations of the example of Jesus and His motivations, carefully studied. The experiment alters the lives of both the participants and their community.

The story picks up a century later. In the late 1980s, a youth minister in Holland, Michigan, commissioned two dozen inexpensive WWJD? wristbands to give to her youth group as a reminder of the challenge. The trinkets became increasingly popular around the city and caught on nationwide in 1997.

In effect, the marketers are enjoying great success through the mass distribution of a question. The popularity of WWJD? paraphernalia may rest precisely on the willingness—perhaps eagerness—of the sellers to leave the question's answer to individual purchasers. Yet Sheldon's message was indisputably both individual and social, entailing both moral transformation and compassion toward the needy.

America is in the midst of a spiritual renewal, as noted by Patrick Glynn and others in these pages. The success of the WWJD? phenomenon signals youth's role in that renewal. Now gauged primarily by its market impact, the extent of the trend's influence will be measured in time by the answers, given both personally and communally, to the renewed interest in Sheldon's ageless question. ■

Staci Simmons is a research assistant in the Brookings Governmental Studies program.

THE IDOL PRESIDENT

THE PERPLEXING ROLE OF RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE

BY ALAN WOLFE

Considering that the problem of church and state goes back at least to the time that Jesus proposed a division of labor with Caesar, it can hardly be surprising that America has never quite settled the role that religion should play in public life. Indeed, if Americans can be said to have made distinctive contributions to the problem, they appear to run in exactly contradictory directions. On the one hand, our First Amendment, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, establishes a "wall" between church and state higher and more difficult to scale than those in other liberal democracies in Western Europe, where established state churches can still be found. (Sweden abolished its official ties to Lutheranism only a couple of years ago.) On the other hand, Americans seem to be far more pious and church-going than Europeans; Swedes, once again for comparison's sake, tend to disdain the religiosity that pervades so many aspects of American public life.

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Two hundred years after the brilliant writings of Madison and Jefferson on the topic, Americans cannot make up their minds whether religion is primarily private, public, or some uneasy combination of the two. A generation ago the Warren Court issued pronouncements that seemed determined to root out even the faintest odors of religiosity from the public square. Recently, both President Clinton and those who sought his removal from office appealed to religious imagery to buttress their cases. If we are confused, however, we have good reason: religion is too much part of American self-identity ever to be ignored, especially by institutions that shape our identity as much as government institutions do. Yet nearly all efforts to bring religion and politics closer together seem to end badly, especially in a society populated by people who love God but hate politics.

The Theologians' Declaration

An indication of the difficulties one encounters in thinking through these questions is provided by a

"Declaration concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis in the Clinton Presidency," in which more than 140 theologians protested what they called "the manipulation of religion and the debasing of moral language" surrounding the president's conduct before and after he met Monica Lewinsky. "We believe that serious misunderstandings of repentance and forgiveness are being exploited for political advantage," the declaration continued. "The resulting moral confusion is a threat to the integrity of American religion and to the foundations of a civil society." The signatories were clearly bothered by President Clinton's repeated expression of sorrow, which in their view asked for forgiveness without demonstrating any real repentance. They also felt that highly publicized meetings between the president and various spiritual advisers could result in religious institutions providing "authentication" for the president's immoral behavior.

In bringing religious judgment to bear on a political issue, signatories to the declaration have no choice but to challenge that point of view which holds that faith is a private matter between an individual and his or her God while politics is a public matter involving all the bonds that hold us together as a people. Jean Bethke Elshtain, one of those who signed, questions this point of view with her usual power and eloquence. How can we say that what the president did is in any way private, she asks in her chapter in *Judgment Day at the White House*, which published the theologians' declaration and various arguments defending and criticizing it. "Once a President is elected, he is our President," she writes. "We may not have voted for him, but if he occupies the White House, then he is ours. We are called upon to respond to his appeals, especially when he commits American blood and treasure in times of war and crisis."

To accept the idea that President Clinton can be an effective leader when he so clearly is a man of flawed character, Elshtain continues, indicates that "we have moved into a zone of amoral Machiavellianism that ill befits us as a people. . . ." But is that necessarily bad? For a society to be one of which its members can be proud, it ought to have leaders who manifest such Christian virtues as humility and charity. Yet to survive, a society, even one governed by the rules of law, will from time to time require leaders whose character will make room for duplicity, dishonesty, even disrespect for human life. The great 20th-century philosopher Isaiah Berlin once described Machiavelli's insight in this way: Florence could pursue the objective of being a Christian commonwealth or of being a great state but not both

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simultaneously. If goodness and ruthlessness are incompatible, however, modern societies have designed one method to allow them to coexist: the public/private distinction. As private individuals, we are free to strive to be as virtuous as our faith demands. As public officials, virtue must take its place along with other duties, some of them bordering on vice.

The failure to understand the difference between private and public conduct doomed the New Left, whose slogan—the personal is the political—led directly to the tyranny of political correctness: if our innermost thoughts, what is most private about us, are subject to the scrutiny of the community to which we belong, then government is justified in regulating those thoughts in the public interest. Would the same illiberal consequences follow if we breach the public/private distinctions, not for reasons of politics, but instead for reasons of faith?

Which Religious Values?

I am afraid that the answer must be yes. For any attempt to judge political leaders by the standards of religious values raises the question of which values will be used. The declaration, in a bow to America's religious pluralism, endorses "the public mission of our churches, synagogues, and mosques." Yet not a single one of the signatories is affiliated with a Jewish or Moslem institution and all the contributors to *Judgment Day* make arguments rooted in Christian theology. And even that narrowing of the scope of religion does not help them answer the question of whose morality ought to stand in judgment over the president. For the contributors to *Judgment Day* are both Catholic and Protestant. Not only are there differences between them, but each tradition has its own differences within: Southern Baptists have a different take on morality than Episcopalians, and, as William J. Buckley's chapter in the book makes clear, Catholics are as split on the issue within the faith as are any other group of Americans. One reason to preserve the public/private distinction, in short, is because it holds in check whatever inclination we may have to insist that our values

ought to be everyone's values.

In response to this problem, the president can be held accountable to the religious values of his own faith, a task best undertaken by those who share that faith. Yet while this solution avoids the problem of religious diversity, signers of the declaration find it unsatisfactory. At the Religious Leaders Prayer Breakfast last September 11, President Clinton acknowledged that he had sinned and announced that he would "continue on the path of repentance seeking pastoral support and that of other caring people so that they can hold

me accountable for my own commitment." As is well known, the president met with a number of ministers, including J. Philip Wogaman, pastor of the Foundry United Methodist Church, the very church the Clintons usually attend. (Wogaman himself has written on Christian ethics.) By insisting that none of this is sufficient, signers of the declaration put themselves in an extremely awkward position, for not only are they judging Mr. Clinton's actions, they are also judging the depths of his religious beliefs. On this point, many of the contributors to *Judgment Day*

The Integrity of Religion...

Many of us worry about the political misuse of religion and religious symbols even as we endorse the public mission of our churches, synagogues, and mosques. In particular, we are concerned about the distortion that can come by association with presidential power in events such as the Presidential Prayer Breakfast of September 11, 1998. We fear that the religious community is in danger of being called upon to provide authentication for a politically motivated and incomplete repentance that seeks to avert serious consequences for wrongful acts. While we affirm that pastoral counseling sessions are an appropriate, confidential arena in which to address these issues, we fear that announcing such meetings to convince the public of the President's sincerity compromises the integrity of religion.

From the "Declaration concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis in the Clinton Presidency," *Judgment Day at the White House* (Eerdman's, 1998)

could not go along. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a philosopher and theologian at Yale, wrote that we should "rejoice over the sinner who returns home," not "react with sour grumpiness" to his presumed insincerity.

Signers of the declaration, however much they agree on the need to hold the president accountable, do not agree on their political views; some make it clear that they voted for Mr. Clinton, others indicate their support for positions rooted in their faith (opposition to abortion or the death penalty, greater economic and social justice) that the president does not share or shares only partially, and others sound not dissimilar from the House Republican managers in the impeachment trial. This diversity of viewpoint suggests that the declaration has little in common with—and in fact seems at many points quite hostile to—groups and individuals identified with the Christian right. The Christian Coalition, for example, believes

that religion cannot be divorced from morality and that morality cannot be kept apart from politics, whereas the declaration only states that "politics and morality cannot be separated," a far less contentious proposition. Because they avoid the extremism of the religious right, signers of this declaration are not put in the position of saying that the American people, who have insisted all along that Mr. Clinton should not be removed from office, are somehow immoral. (One exception is Stanley Hauerwas, who writes that "Bill Clinton is what we should expect, given our politics.") Down that road lies an eventual attack on democracy, as if any conflict between popular opinion and the truth known by people of faith has to be resolved in favor of the latter.

If Not the People, Who?

Yet if the president must be judged, someone must do the judging. Instead of the people, the signers of the declaration offer themselves. There are, writes Max Stackhouse of the Princeton Theological Seminary, spin doctors whose job it is to defend the president. But then there are public intellectuals and public theologians who violate their professional duties if they

"adjust judgments to short-term political effects." The real task of such individuals, he continues, is to "identify, clarify, and enhance the deeper structures of justice in and for our common life when things are messy." In a similar way, Jean Elshtain argues that the president's behavior "must be scrutinized critically by those charged with particular responsibility for evaluating the role of religion in public life, and public life in light of religion."

I think both writers are correct to emphasize the importance of public intellectuals in offering dispassionate criticism of public life, for there are indeed few other places from which such criticism can come. But I also think that when one offers himself for that role, one ought to do so with humility. (I leave for others to judge whether I have always followed my own advice here; somehow I doubt that I have.) The task of the social critic is, to be sure, to criticize, but the best criticism, as Michael Walzer has emphasized, is

usually that which takes pains to identify with and understand what is under scrutiny. I am not suggesting that Stackhouse and Elshtain should have put themselves in President Clinton's shoes, nor even in those of the American public. But I do think it correct to emphasize that when two-thirds of the American people hold a viewpoint different from that of the critic, the latter is under more of an obligation to examine his or her own assumptions than the signers of this declaration seem to demonstrate. I say this as someone who, for much of my political life, did take positions with which

most Americans disagreed. Trying to understand why they did so was the first step which brought me from somewhere out in left field politically to my wishy-washy place in the center today.

If there is fault to be found with the signers of the declaration for finding too easy an application of religious values to public issues, ought one not also fault the president for invoking religious language in his own defense? Surely one must, although it cannot be on the terms established by the declaration. Mr. Clinton is in the business of being judged; as a politician,

he has subjected himself to the judgment of the electorate many times. To be sure, he is not eligible to run for president once his term is over and he is unlikely to run for anything else. But that does not give him liberty to seek the judgment of God or his fellow parishioners in highly visible, seemingly orchestrated, ways. I can fully understand why the signatories to the declaration took offense at the president's public displays of his piety. I did as well. But if we find the way he practices politics problematic, we can only seek a political recourse. In its own way, that is what the signatories did, for in collecting signatures, publishing a book, and seeking press coverage of their efforts, they were, however sincere their faith, also engaged in a political effort. It only cheapens the importance of what they believe for them to invoke religious language on their behalf, for in so doing, they have met the president they so strongly disdain more than halfway. ■

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Evangelical?

A Presidential Counselor in the Line of Fire

By Tony Campolo

If anyone still had doubts that religion and politics, God and Caesar, were at the center of the national debate, President Clinton's very public decision to seek pastoral counseling in the wake of the recent scandal must have stilled them. In seeking redemption in public, the president broadened a national argument that had been about sexual behavior and allegations of perjury and obstruction of justice to the vexing question of how a political leader uses—or in the eyes of critics, misuses—religion.

Alan Wolfe's essay here reflects on this debate in a review of *Judgment Day at the White House*, a volume that grew out of the "Declaration concerning Religion, Ethics, and the Crisis in the Clinton Presidency." The declaration, signed by theologians and religious leaders, argued that "serious misunderstandings of repentance and forgiveness are being exploited for political advantage."

At the heart of this controversy is the Rev. Tony Campolo, a well-known evangelical leader selected by the president as one of his spiritual counselors. To shed light on this unusual intersection of the public and the private, we asked the Rev. Campolo to reflect on his experience.



In Christendom some of the most angry criticism of President Clinton comes from the Evangelical community. Because I am part of that community, I have had some intense negative responses to my becoming one of his spiritual advisers.

Almost immediately after the news broke about my involvement with the president, David Black, the president of Eastern College, where I teach, began getting phone calls from irate alumni and financial supporters of the college. Even some of my faculty colleagues joined the angry chorus, claiming that my association with President Clinton would corrupt the good name of the college. In the face of these reactions, I offered Dr. Black my resignation, which he rejected.

In the days and weeks that followed, Dr. Black stood behind my decision to counsel President Clinton. It remains to be seen whether the college will suffer further damage. My fear is that my continued presence on the faculty will lead some pastors to discourage their young congregants from considering Eastern as a place to study.

Several regular contributors to EAPE/Kingdomworks, an evangelical missionary organization with which I am also associated (in an unpaid position), wrote to let me know that they would be discontinuing their giving to our ministries to "at risk" children and teenagers in urban America, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. I worry that a host of other contributors may stop giving without taking the time to write to me about their decision. Yet another concern is that my involvement with the president will cut off my opportunities to speak at evangelical college chapel services, a primary source of new recruits for our EAPE/Kingdomworks ministries. These days, it is a rare night that I do not wake and pace the floor, praying that our ministries will not suffer because of what I have decided to do.

Dealing with the Press. Each year in Washington representatives of America's various religious traditions meet with the president for a prayer breakfast to discuss ways in which the government and religious institutions can work together for the public good. Joan

Brown Campbell, the executive director of the National Council of Churches, and several others suggested that the gathering last year, on September 11, would be a good forum for the president to confess his sins in the Monica Lewinsky affair and to ask for forgiveness. President Clinton did just that, calling what he had done "sin." As a basis for his remarks, the president used Psalm 51, written by King David after his adultery, pleading that God "cleanse" him and help purify his heart. President Clinton told the American people that he also would be asking God to "cleanse" him and make him into a "new" person. What he had to say, in words reflecting the religiosity of his Southern Baptist background, moved him well beyond referring to what he had done as "inappropriate behavior." The president also said that he had chosen a small group of clergymen to meet with him regularly and help him on his path of repentance. He deliberately did not announce who they were.

The prayer breakfast proved a major media event. Following the Friday morning breakfast there was widespread speculation as to whom the president had chosen for this pastoral responsibility. From the beginning, Gordon MacDonald, pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts, and one of the other clergymen chosen to be part of the president's accountability group, and I decided to say nothing to the press and keep as low a public profile as possible. The third member of the group, J. Philip Wogaman, pastor of the Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., where the president usually attends Sunday worship, made a similar decision.

On Saturday evening Gordon MacDonald phoned and told me that the *Boston Globe* was planning to send a reporter to his Sunday morning worship service and that the local TV stations would also be sending camera crews. We both realized that there would be no escape from public notoriety. We decided to issue brief press releases acknowledging that we were the clergy whom the president had chosen and stating that, given our pastoral obligations, we would be giving no interviews.

As I soon discovered, if you do not tell the press who you are, they come up with definitions of their own. On the following Tuesday morning, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story headlined "Clinton Selects Clerics to Give Him Guidance," in which journalist Laurie Goodstein defined me as "a liberal Baptist, who advocates that

Christians accept homosexuality." Her story was quickly picked up by the Associated Press and sent around the world. By the next day, most newspapers were repeating her description of me verbatim.

The label "liberal" is anathema in evangelical Christian circles, as I was soon to be reminded. By Wednesday afternoon, my office was flooded with e-mail, faxes, and phone calls from "concerned evangelicals" alarmed over my new designation. Because many who contacted my office were part of the vital financial base of our various ministries, my first concern was to keep the EAPE/Kingdomworks ministries out of serious trouble.

I called Ms. Goodstein at the *New York Times* to learn the source of her description of me. She recalled that she had met me once and remembered my opposition

to efforts by the Religious Right to deny homosexuals some basic civil rights. She recalled my opposition to the welfare reform bill. She knew that I was part of the Call to Renewal, a broad-based Christian alternative to the politics of the Christian Coalition.

I explained that my refusal to embrace the political stance of the Christian Coalition on every issue did not mean that I was a *liberal* Baptist. I pointed out that many theologically conservative Baptists define themselves—as I do—as politically moderate. And I made clear that despite my concern for the civil rights of homosexuals, homosexual marriage is contrary to my understanding of Scripture.

Two days later the *Times* printed a correction. But a brief comment on page two could not undo what had been spread around the world on page one. Even people whom I know and consider brothers in Christ began repeating the *Times* report.

One such was Cal Thomas, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* and a spokesperson for the Religious Right, who is viewed by evangelists as the voice of truth in the distorting secular media. When he too called me "a liberal Baptist" who recently "has been urging conservative Christians to accept homosexuality," I phoned to contest the labels. He refused to explain why he had called me a liberal Baptist and said that he believed me to be "too close to the line" that separates those who oppose gay and lesbian marriages and those who affirm them. Some evangelical pastors used Thomas's article as all the evidence they needed to lambaste me from their pulpits. Christian talk shows on religious radio stations also used his column to condemn me.

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Another was Pat Robertson, who had interviewed me on the 700 Club a few years earlier and at whose university I had been a chapel speaker. On the evening of September 15, a news report on his 700 Club repeated the comments made about me in the *New York Times*, further damaging my standing among evangelicals.

Wherever I went as a speaker on the evangelical circuit during the weeks that followed, even in Northern Ireland and Brazil, I had to explain myself to pastors and congregations. Indeed, I have come to expect that I will have to justify to evangelical audiences my claim that I am still one of them. Three large evangelical gatherings have canceled my speaking engagements. I was allowed to speak at the 1998 convention of the Southern Baptists of Tennessee and at an American Baptist gathering in West Virginia, though angry pastors protested my place on both programs.

Although more moderate groups, such as mainline denominations, are now inviting me to address their gatherings, it remains to be seen how my involuntary "repositioning" as a speaker will affect the ministries that my evangelical speaking tours helped support.

A Mistake. When I learned that *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines would be featuring major stories on the president's clerical advisers, I contacted reporters there to try to curtail further damage from misinformation. Kenneth Woodward's *Newsweek* article dealt with our theology, trying to understand how our beliefs about grace and forgiveness might influence the way in which we related to the president. The *Time* article was less kind, describing me—ironically, it seemed to me—as being "media savvy" and suggesting that I was trying to further my career as a "motivational speaker."

Still trying to find a way to reassure the people across the country who know me that I was not what *Time* and the *New York Times* had made me out to be, I agreed to do an interview with Peggy Wehmeyer to be shown on Peter Jennings's news show and on *20/20*. I had known Ms. Wehmeyer, an evangelical Christian who had done several television stories on our missionary work, for more than five years. When Gordon MacDonald indicated that he too was favorably disposed to an interview with her, I readily consented. We had turned down invitations from dozens of talk shows and news shows, but I thought that doing just this one spot would enable me to correct misconceptions and then end my dealings with the media.

In the interview we did our best not to say anything to suggest what happens during our sessions with the president, but I now think that the interview chipped away at our efforts to maintain perfect pastoral confidentiality. Certainly, the airing of the interview brought some

accusatory letters. In the weeks that followed, everywhere I went to preach or lecture, reporters in the audience would seize on what I said from the pulpit to try to apply it to my conversations with the president. I have finally learned, I think, how to tailor my speaking accordingly.

Using Religion. Meanwhile, the Internet too had become my enemy. At least 3,000 articles, most derogatory and many declaring me to be an enemy of true Christianity, were readily available to anyone with a computer. Friends also informed me that the Internet had been used by a large group of academic theologians to issue a declaration condemning the president for the way he had repented of his sins and contending that his calling on pastors as an accountability group was cheapening the nature of true repentance. Suggesting that the president was merely trying to provide some religious but-tressing to a weakened presidency, they proposed that the only evidence of true repentance would be his resignation from office.

Though all the signers of the declaration appeared not to trust the president's three clerical advisers to follow through with their understanding of the biblical requisites in the face of sin, not one had followed the injunction in Matthew 18 that if Christians are concerned that brothers or sisters are in error, they should go to them directly and confront them personally. Still, I am open to the possibility that the signers' declaration may well contain some important warnings. Religion *can* be used for political purposes. There *is* a tendency in our society to cheapen the repentance process to nothing more than a contrite declaration of "I'm sorry."

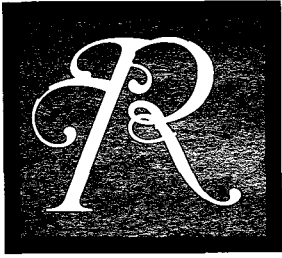
Prayers for the President. More than four months have passed since the president asked me to serve him as a spiritual adviser. Still the letters come, many condemning, others affirming, encouraging, and grateful that I am available to the president during this time of national crisis. Jerry Falwell, in a phone conversation, let me know that he was praying for us daily in the hope that God's will for the president would be done through us. As I go across the country, people regularly let me know their opinions on what I am doing, and, again, many assure me that they are praying for my ministry to the president.

One thing is certain. My involvement in what one newscaster called "the most difficult pastoral responsibility in the world" has changed my life forever. Once referred to by some, flatteringly, as "prophetic," now I am known as a spiritual adviser to the president. To many my new mission appears to compromise my strong evangelical stance. The criticism pushes me harder to do what has been given me to do with all zeal and faithfulness. ■

RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE

MOVING PRIVATE FUNDS
TO FAITH-BASED SOCIAL
SERVICE PROVIDERS

BY JAMES
Q. WILSON



Religion makes a large difference in the lives of millions of Americans despite the fact that American government is indifferent to it and hostile to its support. This may only appear to be a paradox. In fact, religion may be important in the United States in part because governmental indifference allows so many religions to prosper. Voltaire foresaw as much when he observed that a nation with one religion has oppression, a nation with two has civil war, and a nation with a hundred has peace. Much the same argument was made by Adam Smith.

Though the United States is a nation inhabited by people from other countries where religious observance is less important than it is here, the law and culture that sustain multiple sects have worked their effect on many who have arrived here, giving them a chance to form and organize around their own beliefs, to create and sustain their own churches, and to proclaim and defend their own visions. America enjoys religious freedom, and accordingly many religions have prospered. Freedom of religious expression has not stunted religion, it has encouraged it.

It has especially encouraged the kind of religion that is often called fundamentalist. Churches that, by their own beliefs, feel it necessary to reach out and organize others—churches, that is, in which the missionary impulse is particularly strong—are

the ones that most benefit from religious freedom. Missionary churches depend for their survival on the people whom they can convert, and so they are the ones most likely to reflect the wants and needs of ordinary people. More traditional churches, with little missionary impulse, are at a disadvantage. They will often find their numbers dwindling because they have no serious impulse to increase these numbers. Put simplistically, a traditional church is one to which its nominal members repair when getting married or buried but to which they rarely give their regular attention. A fundamentalist church, by contrast, is

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one that can exist only if it succeeds in drawing to it people for whom religion makes a daily difference.

Fundamentalist churches not only benefit from religious liberty, they contribute to it. David Hume explained why. Those religions that rely on what he called “enthusiasm”—that is, on a belief in direct and divine illumination—lead to more furious passions but in time to greater civil liberty. The reason, Hume observed in his essay “On Superstition and Enthusiasm,” is that enthusiasm is both the enemy of hierarchical churches and an expression of animated people who cherish liberty. What we now call a fundamentalist church—one that believes that people can acquire a direct knowledge of God without priestly intervention—depends on the religious equivalent of the entrepreneurial spirit, just as a small business person, unlike the politically more powerful large corporation, depends on economic freedom.

For these reasons, and for others I do not yet understand, religious observance is more common in the United States than in many other industrialized nations even though this country was settled by people from the very nations where such observances are less customary.

This great force in American life makes a difference in human life. This is a matter to which scholars have given relatively little attention because scholars, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, are disproportionately drawn from the ranks of people who are indifferent—or even hostile—to religion.

But if a creed did not make some difference, far fewer people would embrace it.

Religion and Morality

Religion affects morality, but not in the way many people suppose. Let me repeat here an argument made more fully by Michael Oakeshott in *Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life*. Religion, I think, can neither be the source of morality nor provide the support for morality. It cannot be the source because it is obvious that there are highly moral people who are not religious and fanatical extremists who are deeply religious. In every nation there are many moral people who have few or weak religious views and act morally without reference to a religious doctrine. Occasionally, an entire nation seems unreligiously moral. Japan is often held up, rightly, as a nation remarkably free of the worse excesses of crime, drug

abuse, and political violence, yet Japan has achieved this record, one that cannot be duplicated by any other advanced industrial nation, without much that resembles religious commitment. Religion is rarely, even in its sermons and writings, a true source of morality. When Jesus told us of the Golden Rule, he was not telling us anything we had not known before; he was only reminding us that, though we knew this rule, we were often violating it. As Samuel Johnson was later to put it, people need to be reminded more often that they need to be instructed.

Nor is it the case that religion provides the main sanction for a moral code. Many people believe that the natural life of humans cannot supply a guide to human action. If we think that by contemplating who we are and how society is orga-

nized we can find a principle of right conduct, we commit what some have called the naturalistic fallacy. This problem leads many to believe that human nature is so devoid of moral sentiments that any moral code of action must require divine revelation. We are then induced to obey that code either out of a desire to please the God that supplied it or out of a desire to avoid the threat of eternal damnation or to acquire otherworldly pleasures.

The desire to please God is a worthy one, but it is not clear that pleasing the commands of a superior force is sufficient to define an act as moral. It would be equivalent to acting morally because we wish to please a friend. That is not an unworthy motive and

is indeed the source of much moral behavior, but it does raise a question: does moral action require subordination to another party? Perhaps to some extent, but not to every extent. Morality entirely defined as obedience to a superior being becomes identical to blind obedience. It suggests that morality depends on obedience even though many people make moral choices without such obedience. They make those choices because the so-called naturalistic fallacy is itself a fallacy: there are aspects of human nature and of the social order that generate moral sentiments.

A clearer argument against the view that religion enforces morality arises when we consider people who follow a rule to avoid threats or acquire pleasures. Can we be called moral if we avoid stealing only when a police officer is watching or contribute to charity only when we are applauded at a banquet? I think not.



Lloyd Wolff

Religion's chief contribution to morality is to enable people to transform their lives. This is not an easy process and requires of people an act of faith that many persons cannot supply and few will sustain. A profound act of faith does not necessarily make us better, it only makes us more knowledgeable. We come to know God and through Him to know ourselves. And what we learn about ourselves is, I suspect, quite unsettling. We are weak, greedy, impassioned, ill-tempered, and contradictory; we can barely be good any of the time, much less most of the time. As Christopher Lasch put it in *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, religion, far from putting doubts and anxieties to rest, tends to intensify them.

The people for whom a religious experience heightens doubts and sharpens anxieties are people who are leading wasted or immoral lives. Religion does not solve their problems; it heightens them to the point that people finally feel they ought to do something about them. It creates an opportunity for personal transformation.

Consider the single most important organized example of personal transformation we have. It was created by neither churches nor businesses nor government, but by a few people whose lives had become unlivable. It is called Alcoholics Anonymous. Started in 1935, it does not impart a religion but uses faith in a supreme being as a motivation for transforming the lives of drunkards. We are not quite certain why it works so well. We have no data, in part because AA has no interest in generating data (and a good thing, too). But whatever makes it work for many (but far from all) of its members, it signifies the importance of self-discovery and personal transformation in human life.

Despite the general indifference of social science to religion, we can clutch at other bits of evidence. The Harvard economist, Richard Freeman, found that among black urban youth, other things being equal, those who were religious were less likely to be criminal than those who were irreligious. Byron Johnson, a sociologist, has looked at the data and come to much the same conclusion. There is even some sketchy evidence that faith-based prison programs are more likely to improve the lives of inmates after they are released than are rehabilitative programs that do not involve religion. And in every big city and many small cities in America, church-based groups are working at reducing delinquency, drug abuse, gang wars, teenage pregnancy, and single-parent

homes. We have no systematic evidence as to whether these programs are working in any large sense—that is, for lots of people—but ample testimony that they do work in a small sense—that is, by changing the lives of identifiable individuals.

Government and Religion

The evidence, though not conclusive, does suggest rather strongly that religion can make a difference in the lives of people about whom we worry—and ought to worry—the most. Can the government take advantage of the transforming power of religion without corrupting its use through heavy-handed regulations and endless litigation? To answer that question, we

must acknowledge the great importance of the First Amendment to the Constitution and then deplore the sorry state of law that has emerged about its implications.

The second part of that amendment is the “free exercise” clause that denies the federal government the power to prohibit or require religious practices. It guarantees, in short, freedom of religious conscience. Not only does that rule keep the government's hands out of our religious—or irreligious—beliefs, it also facilitates the growth of religion by permitting new faiths and churches to spring up as people respond to them. Enforcing the free exercise clause offers some problems, in particular that of regulating behavior that may have a religious motivation. The courts have said we are free to believe but not necessarily free to act. Thus the courts will not always permit what a religion commands. In consequence, they have allowed the government to ban Mormon polygamy and have not allowed the Amish to exempt themselves from paying Social Security taxes; they

have upheld a ban on Indian use of peyote for religious reasons but have allowed religiously justified animal sacrifice.

Though the free exercise clause is a fount of continual litigation, its general purpose remains clear. It was well understood when first put into the Bill of Rights: no one, so far as anyone can tell, disagreed with the view that everyone should have religious freedom to worship or not as each saw fit. Nothing of the sort can be said about the preceding part of the amendment, the so-called establishment clause. No one, including whoever wrote it, has ever provided a clear understanding of it. James Madison proposed to the First Congress language specifying that no “national religion” shall be established. Once it got to the floor of the House, it was changed to read “Congress shall make no law establishing religion.” In the

The people for whom a religious experience heightens doubts and sharpens anxieties are people who are leading wasted or immoral lives. Religion does not solve their problems; it heightens them to the point that people finally feel they ought to do something about them. It creates an opportunity for personal transformation.

Senate, the language was still different: "Congress shall make no law establishing articles of faith, or a mode of worship..." Though different, all these versions had two things in common: they were restrictions on what the federal government, not state governments, could do, and they were aimed at preventing Congress from creating a church or telling people how to worship in one. What emerged from the conference committee was the ambiguous language we now have: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."

What in the world does "respecting" mean? No one has any idea. The members of Congress who voted for it left no commentary, nor did anyone else. The Supreme Court, however, has created its own commentary. The decisive case, *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*, was decided in 1947. In it, the Court allowed New Jersey to reimburse parents for bus fare to school, including to parochial schools. But in the same ruling, it announced that the "respecting" clause erected a "wall of separation" between church and state. That phrase was written by Thomas Jefferson in 1802 in a letter to a group of Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut. Jefferson, recall, was not at the constitutional convention and was not a member of the Congress that wrote the First Amendment. He was in no position at all to explain what "respecting" meant. Moreover, he was a religious radical who had worked hard to separate church and state in ways that most politicians disliked. But the Supreme Court liked his phrase and decided that is what the clause meant.

Incoherent Case Law

Today it requires a lengthy textbook to describe the ways in which the Court has enforced the wall or permitted (as it did in the 1947 case) governments to dig under, crawl over, or run around the so-called wall. Consider how often the wall is breached: "In God We Trust" is printed on our dollar bills and "One nation, under God" is part of the Pledge of Allegiance, but we cannot permit a nativity scene to appear in a court house. The House and the Senate begin each meeting with a prayer and the government pays ministers of various faiths to be chaplains for the armed services, but we cannot allow a nonsectarian prayer to begin a high school graduation. The federal government can use the G.I. bill to pay the tuition costs of veterans attending religious as well as secular colleges, but states cannot supply financial aid to students attending parochial schools.

It is pointless to belabor the obvious: the Supreme Court has created case law about the establishment clause that is to some significant degree incoherent. Incoherent, but not

uncodified. In 1972, the Court, in the case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, set forth three rules for deciding when a statute could involve religion. First, the statute must have a secular purpose; second, its primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and third, it must not foster an excessive entanglement with religion. But as Professor Henry Abraham has noted, on the very day that *Lemon* was announced, the Court decided that it was constitutional for the federal government to spend a quarter of a billion dollars for constructing buildings on private, including religious, college campuses. Among the reasons given by the author of this opinion, Chief Justice William Burger, was his claim that parochial colleges

are less involved in religious indoctrination than are parochial high schools. May I enter a mild dissent? I attended a relentlessly Baptist college where chapel was compulsory and I (a Catholic student) was given as my academic adviser a Baptist professor who asked me why I did not become a Protestant.

The case law that has tumbled forward since the 1947 *Everson* decision cannot be reconciled by any set of rules. In 1947 New Jersey could reimburse parents for the bus fare they spent sending their children to parochial schools, but in 1972 the Court struck down an Ohio plan to give \$90-per-year tuition rebates to children attending parochial school. In 1980 the Court allowed New York to reimburse parochial schools for certain state-mandated expenses even though in 1977 it had overturned New York's effort to reimburse parochial schools for certain kinds of record-keeping. In 1992 the Court said that a rabbi could not give a nonsectarian invocation at a public school graduation, but a year later allowed a student-led graduation prayer.

The central problem that the Supreme Court has never faced is this: the First Amendment clearly prevents the government from requiring or imposing religious practices (such as a mandatory school prayer or paying tax money to a specific religious institution), but there is no substantial evidence that the framers of the First Amendment ever meant for it to ban nondiscriminatory government aid to all religions generally. The *Lemon* test is an error, because it forbids any government aid that might advance religion generally or that might "entangle" the government in religion, no matter how nondiscriminatory the aid or the entanglement.

Unwanted Government Pressure

But there is another side to the problem of government aid to religious institutions. Federal money brings federal rules, and federal rules can harm, distort, or even crush religious experiences and greatly burden the small ministries of most churches

We must facilitate the movement of private funds into church-connected enterprises that have as their goal the kind of personal transformation that is required if we are to rescue people from social pathology.

and synagogues. Getting and accounting for government money is a task for a trained lawyer and accountant; most churches lack the services of such professionals. Though Congress might have the sense to modify the regulations now governing institutions it funds, left unchecked one can imagine a church grant being subject to a minority group set-aside, church leadership being reshaped by equal employment opportunity criteria, and church membership falling under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Government aid tends to turn aid recipients into the organizational equivalent of the bureaucracy that supplies the aid. The essence of the religious experience is, I think, not one that could be supplied under the aegis of the *Federal Register* and the United States Code. Imagine what would have happened to Alcoholics Anonymous if it had taken federal money. Its mission would have been shaped by government advisers and its appropriation defended by an AA pressure group.

I suspect many, probably most, Americans want to have the government—though not necessarily government aid—held at arm's length from religious institutions. Though there seems to be widespread support for allowing school prayer (a mistake, in my view), there is also widespread aversion to making religious activity mandatory. Americans are, more than the people of almost any other industrialized nation, religious, but as Alan Wolfe has pointed out in his new book *One Nation After All*, Americans are reluctant to impose religious views on other people. His data suggest to me that though Americans are opposed to a constitutional wall of separation between church and state, they tend to support a cultural wall. That cultural wall seems to reflect the growing American recognition that we are, indeed, a multicultural society in which every group owes every other one a substantial degree of respect. Wolfe suggests that Americans are loyal to “the essential truths of transcendental moral principles” but they are also willing to apply them flexibly. By flexibly, Wolfe means with reasonable deference to the personal and cultural circumstances in which ordinary people find themselves.

What Is to Be Done?

If religion is an important source of possible personal transformation but any direct involvement between the government and religion will be denied by the Court, corrupted by Congress, and opposed by the public, what is to be done? I suggest that we must facilitate the movement of private funds into church-connected enterprises that have as their goal the kind of personal transformation that is required if we are to rescue people from social pathology.

A great deal of money—in 1993, as much as \$57 billion—now goes from individual Americans to religious groups. Most of this money is to support churches and synagogues; not much, I suspect, is for important forms of religious outreach. And however the money is used, very little comes from corporations or foundations. Yet corporations contribute large amounts to secular establishments—schools, hospitals, and cultural entities.

We need a faith-based equivalent of the United Way. Not exactly the United Way, of course, but rather an independent organization that identifies useful faith-based outreach programs aimed at the kinds of personal misconduct—alcoholism, crime, delinquency, drug abuse, and single-mom pregnancies—about which Americans are so deeply, and so rightly, concerned. There are countless such church-based efforts. Professor John DiIulio and his associates have catalogued them in several cities. We now need to move beyond a catalogue and toward a switchboard that will direct private giving toward useful programs.

By “useful” a scholar usually means “empirically tested,” but empirical tests are hard to arrange for small, understaffed, and underfunded activities. It would be better to limit the word useful to mean having passed a few simple tests: the program is aimed at reaching people at risk for harmful behavior, is financially honest and intellectually serious, and has won the esteem of knowledgeable observers. In time, perhaps we shall know more about such efforts; some might even be evaluated. But initially, evaluation is much less important than effort.

The amount of money that could be raised by a United Way for Religious Outreach is not trivial. Corporations almost never give their charitable dollars to religious groups, in part because they believe, rightly, that supporting churches is a task for church members and in part because they fear, understandably, criticism from people skeptical of religious activity. But the employees of corporations can make contributions to a variety of enterprises in ways that lead to their donations being matched by corporate funds up to some annual limit. Rarely, however, are faith-based outreach programs on the list of charities approved for such matches. If in each large city there was a United Way for Religious Outreach, it could provide guidance for corporations willing to look for church-based outreach programs and for corporate employees eager to contribute to a particular kind of church outreach. Both corporations and individuals now give money to programs designed to help the needy, but only the largest ones attract support. The Salvation Army, for example, deservedly gets such support, but smaller versions of the same religious effort—small churches with one or two ministers and a handful of volunteers—get nothing.

Helping the kind of personal transformation that is the core function of religion requires that we expect no broad changes, little in the way of a mass movement, and not much in the form of verifiable data. Faith can only transform one person at a time, and then only as the result of the personal attention of one other person. This is not an activity of which research foundations or schools of public policy know much. Or care much. But it is, over the course of human history, a powerful force that has shaped nations and cultures. We ought not let constitutional scruples or personal reservations impede what may be the last best hope of the utterly disadvantaged. ■



SUPPORTING BLACK CHURCHES

*Faith, Outreach, and
the Inner-City Poor*

BLACK AMERICANS are in many ways the most religious people in America. Some 82 percent of blacks (versus 67 percent of whites) are church members; 82 percent of blacks (versus 55 percent of whites) say that religion is “very important in their life.” Eighty-six percent of blacks (versus 60 percent of whites) believe that religion “can answer all or most of today’s problems.”

And the religious faith of black Americans issues today, as it has for more than a century, in active work in the community. In his 1899 classic, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, W. E. B. Du Bois observed, “Without wholly conscious effort the Negro church has become a centre of social intercourse to a degree unknown in white churches.... Consequently all movements for social betterment are apt to centre in the churches.” Almost 100 years later, in their 1990 *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya made a similar finding. In their surveys encompassing nearly 1,900 black ministers and more than 2,100 black churches, some 71 percent of black clergy reported that their churches engaged in community outreach programs. Urban churches, Lincoln and Mamiya found, were generally more engaged in outreach than rural ones. From their comprehensive survey, the authors concluded, “We suspect that black churches, on the whole, are more socially active in their communities than white churches and that they also tend to participate in a greater range of community programs.”

In my view, the most vital work of these active black churches is that done

on the streets in America’s inner cities. Day by day, clergy, volunteers, and people of faith monitor, mentor, and minister to the daily needs of the inner-city black children, who, through absolutely no fault of their own, live in neighborhoods where opportunities are few and drugs, crime, and failed public schools are common. There, faith-driven community activists strive against the odds to help these children—from innocent toddlers, to pregnant teenagers, to young men on probation—avoid violence, achieve literacy, gain jobs, and otherwise reach adulthood physically, educationally, and economically whole.

Is Religion the Answer?

Is there any social scientific evidence to show that religious do-gooding does any good or to justify the faith of most black Americans that religion can “answer all or most of today’s problems”?

Over the past several years, journalists have begun to take a keen interest in that question. In September 1996, the cover of *U.S. News and World Report* asked, “Can Churches Cure America’s Ills?” and the stories answered largely in the affirmative. A June 1998 *Newsweek* cover story on the inner-city ministry of Boston’s Rev. Eugene F. Rivers, III, had been preceded by articles on Rivers’s work by Joe Klein in the *New Yorker*, George Will in the *Washington Post*, and Bob Herbert in the *New York Times*. Another 1998 feature, this one in *Time*

magazine, heralded Brother Bill, a Catholic lay worker who “repeatedly walks into gunfire to stop the shooting—and love the unloved.”

While such “faith factor” journalism is out ahead of the empirical research on religion and social action, it is hardly pure hype. As UCLA’s James Q. Wilson has succinctly summarized the small but not insignificant body of credible evidence to date, “Religion, independent of social class, reduces deviance.” When criminologist Byron Johnson and medical research scientist David Larson reviewed some 400 juvenile delinquency studies published between 1980 and 1997, they found that the more scientific the study, the more optimistic its findings are about the extent to which “religion reduces deviance.” A 1995 article in the journal *Criminology* by David Evans found that religion, “as indicated by religious activities, had direct personal effects on adult criminality as measured by a broad range of criminal acts.”

In relation to black inner-city poverty and related social ills, perhaps the single most illustrative line of “religion reduces deviance” research begins with a 1985 study by Harvard economist Richard Freeman, runs through the work of Larson, and continues through the community development, mentoring, and faith factor research of analysts at Public/Private Ventures, a Philadelphia-based national nonprofit youth policy research organization.

In 1985 Freeman reported that church-going, independent of other factors, made young black males from high-poverty neighborhoods substantially more likely to “escape” poverty, crime, and other social ills. In a reanalysis and extension of Freeman’s work published by the Manhattan Institute, Larson and Johnson mine national time-series data on urban black youth and find that, using a more multidimensional measure of religious commitment than church-going, religion is indeed a powerful predictor of escaping poverty, crime, and other social ills, more powerful even than such variables as peer influences. Like Freeman, Larson and

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Johnson conjecture that the potential of church-going and other religious influences to improve the life prospects of poor black urban youth is in part a function of how church-going and other faith factors influence how young people spend their time, the extent of their engagement in positive structured activities, and the degree to which they are supported by responsible adults.

This conjecture is borne out in part by a 1998 P/PV analysis, based on original survey and field research, of how predominantly minority low-income urban youth spend their time in the “moderately poor” neighborhoods of Austin, Texas; Savannah, Georgia; and St. Petersburg, Florida. First, the bad news. Researchers Cynthia L. Sipe and Patricia Ma found that a majority of children in three groups—aged 12 to 14, 15 to 17, and 18 to 20—in each neighborhood in each city spent most of their after-school time just “hanging out.” Overall, “a disturbingly high share” (from 15 percent to 25 percent) were “not engaged in any positive structured activities,” had “no or very few adults in their lives,” and were “not working.” There is every reason to suppose that the unsupported fraction runs even higher in the poorest inner-city neighborhoods.

Now, however, the good news. Across all age groups and cities, most youth who did receive adult support and guidance (whether at home, in school, or in community organizations) and did participate in positive structured activities were significantly more likely than their “disconnected” peers to succeed. Finally, the good news about religion. The P/PV study had expected to find that public schools and programs like Boys Clubs and Girls Clubs, Police Athletic League, Ys, and Big Brothers Big Sisters provided substantial support for children in these communities. Those expectations were not entirely disappointed. But what the study also revealed was that churches and faith-based programs played a major “support for youth” role in providing after-school “safe havens,” recreation, mentoring, child care, meals, and more. In the Savannah study site, for example, 52 churches dwarfed schools both in sheer numbers and in terms of outreach programs and activities for neighborhood youth, 97 percent of them black.

The unavoidable conclusion, notes P/PV’s Gary Walker, a 25-year veteran of the field, is that “Most private, nonprofit mentoring programs, like most social policy-driven youth development programs, simply don’t reach or support the most severely at-risk inner-city youth.” Where secular mentoring and conventional social services programs for poor urban youth typically end, churches and religious outreach ministries often begin.

Black Church Outreach

The black church’s uniquely powerful community outreach tradition is grounded in eight major historically black Christian churches: African Methodist Episcopal; African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention USA, National Missionary Baptist Convention, and the Progressive National Baptist Conven-

tion. In addition to the 65,000 churches and 20 million members of the eight denominations, scores of independent or quasi-independent black churches or church networks and at least nine certified religious training programs operated by accredited seminaries are also directed toward ministry in black churches and black faith communities.

Unfortunately, until recently, that outreach tradition and what it portends for social action against inner-city ills has been largely ignored by a strange bedfellows assortment of academics and intellectual elites.

Until the 1990s, for example, the richly religious lives of black Americans and the black church outreach tradition were given short shrift by both historians and social scientists, and not just by white historians and social scientists. Writing in 1994 in a special double edition of *National Journal of Sociology*, Andrew Billingsley, a dean of black family studies, noted that the subject was largely ignored even by leading black scholars who were keenly aware of “the social significance of the black church,” including many who “were actually members of a black church.”

For example, James Blackwell’s 1975 book *The Black Community*, considered by Billingsley and several other experts to be “the best study” of its kind since Du Bois’s *The Philadelphia Negro*, devoted not a single chapter to the black church, and Billingsley’s own 1968 *Black Families in White America*, written as a rebuttal to the 1965 Moynihan Report on the breakdown of the American black family, “devoted less than two pages to discussing the relevance of the black church as a support system for African-American families.” Billingsley speculates that black intellectuals ignored black churches in part out of a false fidelity to the canons of objective scholarship.

It is perhaps easier to explain why secular white intellectuals on both the left and the right have often overlooked black churches. Sheer ignorance is one factor. Ideology is another. On the secular left, black churches have been made synonymous with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. They are valued mainly for supporting successive liberal causes that favor big government, not for supporting local social action, and least of all for action led by people who, whatever their politics, can often be heard to take the divinity of Jesus Christ as seriously as they take the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In essence, for secular liberals to take full heed of the black church outreach tradition would be for them not only to “do God,” but to kneel before the principle of subsidiarity, a principle rooted firmly in Christian social thought and well-defined by Harvard’s Mary Ann Glendon as “the notion that no social task should be allocated to a body larger than the smallest one that can effectively do the job.” That is something many secular liberals, including liberal civil libertarians who fear that any real engagement with churches or church-state cooperation will unduly advantage religion and promote “intolerance” in the public square, will never do.

Until recently, many on the right stereotyped black churches and community-serving religious organizations gen-

erally (Salvation Army, Catholic Charities) as political props of big-government liberalism. But even conservatives who do not see black urban ministers simply as agents of liberal policy agendas have misunderstood black churches. For example, in a 1997 book purporting to speak for "the bold new voice of black conservatives in America," it is asserted that while black Americans "hold mainstream social norms, and their leaders know the ravages that drugs, crime and dependency have meant for black areas," black "community leaders and clergymen seldom speak up publicly for enforcing mores."

The truth, however, is that many or most do indeed "speak publicly" on family responsibility and related matters. Until recently, however, they have rarely been heard. Countless black church leaders I have met, heard, and studied over the past several years may or may not hold conventionally conservative political views on "enforcing mores," but they are, if anything, more vocal, more committed, and more consistent about promoting and enforcing personal, family, and community responsibility than many conservatives I know, white and black.

In his chapter of that book, Reverend Jesse Peterson, a grassroots community activist in Los Angeles who assists young black men, confronts an issue that I have heard raised and debated among inner-city black church leaders, namely, how the politicization of some black urban churches and the empire-building of some clergymen have "had a corrupting influence" on the black church outreach tradition: "While urban black churches are literally falling apart, ministers are striving to build bigger churches and to maximize the membership of their churches. But Jesus came to give life, not fame and money. We have an out-of-wedlock pregnancy rate of nearly 70 percent...random violence terrorizes black neighborhoods; husbands walk out on their wives and families; and drugs are openly sold on the streets. With black churches on almost every street corner in black neighborhoods, we have to begin to examine why the church is so ineffective at bringing life to black communities."

Black church leaders, young and old, are keenly aware of this dilemma, though most state it more gently. A more refined and empirically well-grounded perspective on variations in the extent of black church outreach is provided by sociologist Harold Dean Trulear, an ordained black minister who did outreach work in New Jersey, taught for eight years at the New York Theological Seminary, has conducted extensive research on black clergy training, and is now vice president for research on religion and at-risk youth at P/PV.

"When it comes to youth and community outreach in the inner city," Trulear cautions, "not all black urban churches are created equal....Inner-city churches with high resident membership cater more to high-risk neighborhood youth than...black churches with inner-city addresses but increasingly or predominantly suburbanized or commuting congregations....It's the small and medium-sized churches...(especially) the so-called...blessing stations and specialized youth chapels with their charismatic leader and their small, dedicated staff of adult volunteers (that)...do a disproportionate amount

of the up close and personal outreach work with the worst-off inner-city youth."

When it comes to social action against urban problems and the plight of the black inner-city poor, the reality is that black churches cannot do it all (or do it alone) and that not all black churches do it. But that reality should obscure neither the black church tradition nor its many and powerful contemporary manifestations from Boston to Austin, from New York to Los Angeles.

Today a number of intellectuals and policy leaders are reclaiming the black church tradition. In a 1997 essay in these pages, Boston University's Glenn Loury and Tufts University's Linda Datcher-Loury, writing not only as economists but as blacks attached to black churches, argued persuasively that voluntary associations, "as exemplified by religious institutions," can be valuable allies in the battle against social pathology. From a less academic, more practice-driven perspective, Robert L. Woodson, Sr., president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise in Washington, D.C., reclaims that black church outreach tradition in his 1998 book, *The Triumphs of Joseph: How Today's Community Healers Are Reviving Our Streets and Neighborhoods*.

The Least of Us, the Rest of Us

If black church outreach is so potent, then how come inner-city poverty, crime, and other problems remain so severe? That is a fair question, but it can easily be turned around: how much worse would things be in Boston and Jamaica Queens, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, and other cities were it not for the until recently largely unsung efforts of faith-based youth and community outreach efforts? How much more would government or other charitable organizations need to expend, and how many volunteers would suddenly need to be mobilized, in the absence of church-anchored outreach? The only defensible answers are "much worse" and "lots," respectively.

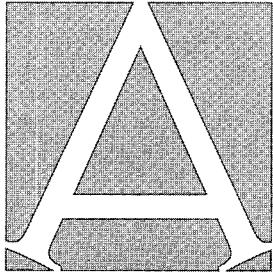
Religious institutions alone cannot reasonably be expected to cure the social problems that disproportionately afflict the black inner-city poor. It remains to be seen how, if at all, the local faith-based efforts can be taken to scale in ways that predictably, reliably, and cost-effectively cut crime, reduce poverty, or yield other desirable social consequences.

But overlooking, unduly discounting, or simply failing to support the outreach efforts of black churches and other inner-city faith communities is the single biggest mistake that can be made by anyone who cares about the future of the truly disadvantaged men, women, and children of all races who call the inner cities home.

Citizens who for whatever reasons are nervous about religion or enhanced church-state partnerships should focus on the consistent finding that faith-based outreach efforts benefit poor unchurched neighborhood children most of all. If these churches are so willing to support and reach out to "the least of these," surely they deserve the human and financial support of the rest of us—corporations, foundations, other Christian churches, and, where appropriate, government agencies. ■

“NO AID TO”

Charitable Choice and the First Amendment



s government struggles to solve a confounding array of poverty-related social problems—deficient education, un- and underemployment, substance abuse, broken families, substandard housing, violent crime, inadequate health care, crumbling urban infrastructures—it

has turned increasingly to the private sector, including a wide range of faith-based agencies. As described in Stephen Monsma's *When Sacred and Secular Mix*, public funding for non-profit organizations with a religious affiliation is surprisingly high. Of the faith-based child service agencies Monsma surveyed, 63 percent reported that more than 20 percent of their budget came from public funds.

Government's unusual openness to cooperation with the private religious sector arises in part from public disenchantment with its programs, but also from an increasingly widespread view that the nation's acute social problems have moral and spiritual roots. Acknowledging that social problems arise both from unjust socioeconomic structures and from misguided personal choices, scholars, journalists, politicians, and community activists are calling attention to the vital and unique role that religious institutions play in social restoration.

Though analysis of the outcomes of faith-based social services is as yet incomplete, the available evidence suggests that some of those services may be more effective and cost-efficient than similar secular and government programs. One oft-cited example is Teen Challenge, the world's largest residential drug rehabilitation program, with a reported rehabilitation rate of over 70 percent—a vastly higher success rate than most other programs, at a substantially lower cost. Multiple studies identify religion as a key variable in escaping the inner city, recovering from alcohol and drug addiction, keeping marriages together, and staying out of prison.

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The New Cooperation and the Courts

Despite this potential, public-private cooperative efforts involving religious agencies have been constrained by the current climate of First Amendment interpretation. The ruling interpretive principle on public funding of religious nonprofits—following the metaphor of the wall of separation between church and state, as set forth in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947)—is “no aid to religion.” While most court cases have involved funding for religious elementary and secondary schools, clear implications have been drawn for other types of “pervasively sectarian” organizations. A religiously affiliated institution may receive public funds—but only if it is not too religious.

Application of the no-aid policy by the courts, however, has been confusing. The Supreme Court has provided no single, decisive definition of “pervasively sectarian” to determine which institutions qualify for public funding, and judicial tests

RELIGION?

BY RONALD J. SIDER AND HEIDI ROLLAND UNRUH



Lloyd Wolf

have been applied inconsistently. Rulings attempting to separate the sacred and secular aspects of religiously based programs often appear arbitrary from a faith perspective, and at worst border on impermissible entanglement. As a result of this legal confusion, some agencies receiving public funds pray openly with their clients, while other agencies have been banned even from displaying religious symbols. Faith-based child welfare agencies have greater freedom in incorporating religious components than religious schools working with the same population. Only a few publicly funded religious agencies have been challenged in the courts, but such leniency may not continue. While the no-aid principle holds official sway, faith-based agencies must live with the tension that what the government gives with one hand, it can take away (with legal damages to boot) with the other. The lack of legal recourse leaves agencies vulnerable to pressures from public officials and community leaders to secularize their programs.

The Supreme Court's restrictive rulings on aid to religious agencies stand in tension with the government's movement toward greater reliance on private sector social initiatives. If the no-aid principle were applied consistently against all religiously affiliated agencies now receiving public funding, government administration of social services would face significant setbacks. This ambiguous state of affairs for public-private cooperation has created a climate of mistrust and misunderstanding, in which faith-based agencies are reluctant to expose themselves to risk of lawsuits, civic authorities are confused about what is permissible, and multiple pressures push religious organizations into hiding or compromising their identity, while at the same time, many public officials and legislators are willing to look the other way when faith-based social service agencies include substantial religious programming.

Fortunately, an alternative principle of First Amendment interpretation, which Monsma identifies as the "equal treatment" strain, has recently been emerging in the Supreme Court. This line of reasoning—as in *Widmar v. Vincent* (1981) and *Rosenberger v. Rector* (1995)—holds that public access to facilities or benefits cannot exclude religious groups. Although the principle has not yet been applied to funding for social service agencies, it could be a precedent for defending cooperation between government and faith-based agencies where the offer of funding is available to any qualifying agency.

The section of the 1996 welfare reform law known as Charitable Choice paves the way for this cooperation by prohibiting government from discriminating against nonprofit applicants for certain types of social service funding (whether by grant, contract, or voucher) on the basis of their religious nature. Charitable Choice also shields faith-based agencies receiving federal funding from governmental pressures to alter their religious character—among other things, assuring their freedom to hire staff who share their religious perspective. Charitable Choice prohibits religious nonprofits from using government funds for "inherently religious" activities—defined as "sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization"—but allows them to raise money from nongovernment sources to cover the costs of any such activities they choose to integrate into their program. Clearly, Charitable Choice departs from the dominant "pervasively sectarian" standard for determining eligibility for government funding, which has restricted the funding of thoroughly religious organizations. It

makes religiosity irrelevant to the selection of agencies for public-private cooperative ventures and emphasizes instead the public goods to be achieved by cooperation. At the same time, Charitable Choice protects clients' First Amendment rights by ensuring that services are not conditional on religious preference, that client participation in religious activities is voluntary, and that an alternative nonreligious service provider is available.

The First Amendment and the Case for Charitable Choice

Does Charitable Choice violate the First Amendment's non-establishment and free exercise clauses?

We think not. As long as participants in faith-based programs freely choose those programs over a "secular" provider and may opt out of particular religious activities within the program, no one is coerced to participate in religious activity, and freedom of religion is preserved. As long as government is equally open to funding programs rooted in any religious perspective—whether Islam, Christianity, philosophic naturalism, or no explicit faith perspective—government is not establishing or providing preferential benefits to any specific religion or to religion in general. As long as religious institutions maintain autonomy over such crucial areas as program content and staffing, the integrity of their separate identity is maintained. As long as government funds are exclusively designated for activities that are not inherently religious, no taxpayer need fear that taxes are paying for religious activity. While Charitable Choice may increase interactions between government and religious institutions, these interactions do not in themselves violate religious liberty. Charitable Choice is designed precisely to discourage such interactions from leading to impermissible entanglement or establishment of religion.

Not only does Charitable Choice not violate proper church-state relations, it strengthens First Amendment protections. In the current context of extensive government funding for a wide array of social services, limiting government funds to allegedly "secular" programs actually offers preferential treatment to one specific religious worldview.

In setting forth this argument, we distinguish four types of social service providers. First are *secular providers* who make no explicit reference to God or any ultimate values. People of faith may work in such an agency—say, a job training program that teaches job skills and work habits—but staff use only cur-

rent techniques from the social and medical sciences without reference to religious faith. Expressing explicit faith commitments of any sort is considered inappropriate.

Second are *religiously affiliated providers* (of any religion) who incorporate little inherently religious programming and rely primarily on the same medical and social science methods as a secular agency. Such a program may be provided by a faith community and a staff with strong theological reasons for their involvement, and religious symbols and a chaplain may be present. A religiously affiliated job training program might be housed in a church, and clients might be informed about the church's religious programs and about the availability of a chaplain's services. But the content of the training curriculum would be very similar to that of a secular program.

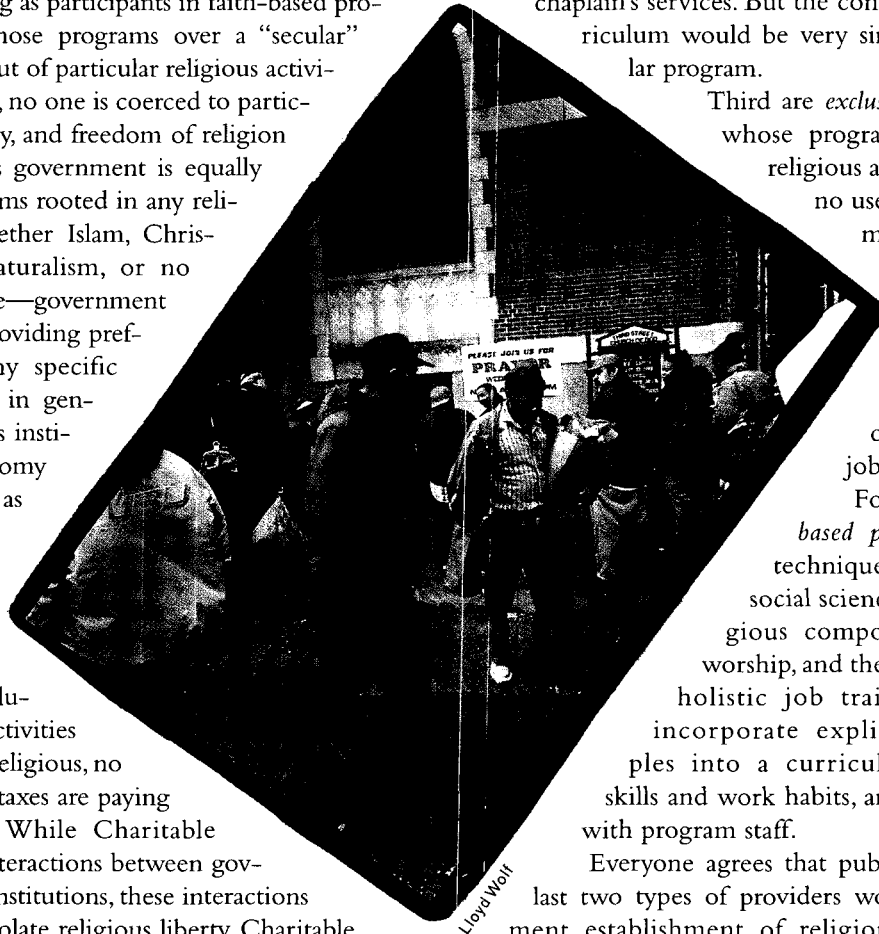
Third are *exclusively faith-based providers* whose programs rely on inherently religious activities, making little or no use of techniques from the medical and social sciences. An example would be a prayer support group and Bible study or seminar that teaches biblical principles of work for job-seekers.

Fourth are *holistic faith-based providers* who combine techniques from the medical and social sciences with inherently religious components such as prayer, worship, and the study of sacred texts. A holistic job training program might incorporate explicitly biblical principles into a curriculum that teaches job skills and work habits, and invite clients to pray with program staff.

Everyone agrees that public funding of only the last two types of providers would constitute government establishment of religion. But if government (because of the "no aid to religion" principle) funds only secular programs, is this a properly neutral policy?

Not really, for two reasons. First, given the widespread public funding for private social services, if government funds only secular programs, it puts all faith-based programs at a disadvantage. Government would tax everyone—both religious and secular—and then fund only allegedly secular programs. Government-run or government-funded programs would be competing in the same fields with faith-based programs lacking access to such support.

Second, secular programs are not religiously neutral. Implicitly, purely "secular" programs convey the message that nonreligious technical knowledge and skills are sufficient to address social problems such as low job skills and single par-



Lloyd Wolf

enthoo. Implicitly, they teach the irrelevance of a spiritual dimension to human life. Although secular programs may not explicitly uphold the tenets of philosophical naturalism and the belief that nothing exists except the natural order, *implicitly* they support such a worldview. Rather than being religiously neutral, “secular” programs implicitly convey a set of naturalistic beliefs about the nature of persons and ultimate reality that serve the same function as religion. Vast public funding of only secular programs means massive government bias in favor of one particular quasi-religious perspective—namely, philosophical naturalism.

Religiously affiliated agencies (type two), which have received large amounts of funding in spite of the “no aid to religion” principle, pose another problem. These agencies often claim a clear religious identity—in the agency’s history or name, in the religious identity and motivations of sponsors and some staff, in the provision of a chaplain, or in visible religious symbols. By choice or in response to external pressures, however, little in their program content and methods distinguishes many of these agencies from their fully secular counterparts. Prayer, spiritual counseling, Bible studies, and invitations to join a faith community are not featured; in fact, most such agencies would consider inherently religious activities inappropriate to social service programs.

Millions of public dollars have gone to support the social service programs of religiously affiliated agencies. There are three possible ways to understand this apparent potential conflict with the “no aid to religion” principle. Perhaps these agencies are finally only nominally religious, and in fact are essentially secular institutions, in which case their religious sponsors should be raising questions. Or perhaps they are more pervasively religious than they have appeared to government funders, in which case the government should have withheld funding.

The third explanation may be that these agencies are operating with a specific, widely accepted worldview that holds that people may need God for their spiritual well-being, but that their social problems can be addressed exclusively through medical and social science methods. Spiritual nurture, in this worldview, is important in its place, but has no direct bearing on achieving public goods like drug rehabilitation or overcoming welfare dependency. Such a worldview acknowledges the spiritual dimension of persons and the existence of a transcendent realm outside of nature. But it also teaches (whether explicitly or implicitly) a particular understanding of God and persons, by addressing people’s social needs independently of their spiritual nature. By allowing aid to flow only to the religiously affiliated agencies holding this understanding, government in effect has given preferential treatment to a particular religious worldview.

Holistic faith-based agencies (type four), on the other hand, operate on the belief that no area of a person’s life—whether psychological, physical, social, or economic—can be adequately considered in isolation from the spiritual. Agencies operating out of this worldview consider the explicitly spiritual components of their programs—used in conjunction

with conventional, secular social service methods—as fundamental to their ability to achieve the secular social goals desired by government. Government has in the past considered such agencies ineligible for public funding, though they may provide the same services as their religiously affiliated counterparts.

Some claim that allowing public funds to be channeled through a holistic religious program would threaten the First Amendment, while funding religiously affiliated agencies does not. But the pervasively sectarian standard has also constituted a genuine, though more subtle, establishment of religion, because it supports one type of religious worldview while penalizing holistic beliefs. It should not be the place of government to judge between religious worldviews—but this is what the no-aid principle has required the courts to do. Selective religious perspectives on the administration of social services are deemed permissible for government to aid. Those who believe that explicitly religious content does not play a central role in addressing social problems are free to act on this belief with government support; those who believe that spiritual nurture is an integral aspect of social transformation are not.

The alternative is to pursue a policy that discriminates neither against nor in favor of any religious perspective. Charitable Choice enables the government to offer equal access to benefits to any faith-based nonprofit, as long as the money is not used for inherently religious activities and the agency provides the social benefits desired by government. Charitable Choice does not ask courts to decide which agencies are too religious. It clearly indicates the types of “inherently religious” activities that are off-limits for government funding. The government must continue to make choices about which faith-based agencies will receive funds, but eligibility for funding is to be based on an agency’s ability to provide specific public goods, rather than on its religious character. Charitable Choice moves the focus of church-state interactions away from the religious beliefs and practices of social service agencies, and onto the common goals of helping the poor and strengthening the fabric of public life.

A Model for Change

Our treasured heritage of religious freedom demands caution as we contemplate new forms of church-state cooperation—but caution does not preclude change, if the benefits promise to outweigh the dangers. Indeed, change is required if the pervasively sectarian standard is actually biased in favor of some religious perspectives and against others.

For church and state to cooperate successfully, both must remain true to their roles and mission. Religious organizations must refrain from accepting public funds if that means compromising their beliefs and undermining their effectiveness and integrity. Fortunately, Charitable Choice allows faith-based agencies to maintain their religious identity, while expanding the possibilities for constructive cooperation between church and state in addressing the nation’s most serious social problems. ■



FROM COLONIAL TIMES, religious congregations and religious organizations in the United States have been providing not only for the spiritual needs of their congregants and communities, but for their social welfare as well. Indeed, until the close of the 19th century, religious groups were virtually the nation's sole provider of social services. Social work, the profession now dedicated to caring for the human and social needs of society's most disadvantaged members, is rooted in religious theology and practice but is now distanced from faith-based social services.

The split between faith-based social services and social work began at the turn of the 20th century. In 1897 Reverend Samuel H. Gurteen organized the Buffalo Charity Organization Society, modeled on similar groups in London and Glasgow whose new philosophy was that the needs of the poor should be

met not only by members of religious congregations but also by the wealthy of the community at large. Under the influence of these societies, social services gradually traded their community-religious base for one that was citywide, temporal, and professional. The delivery of social services became less arbitrary and more systematic, and social work became increasingly secular, in a process that reached its culmination in 1935 with the enactment of the Social Security Act.

But despite the secular evolution of

the welfare state, religious congregations have quietly continued to provide social services over the years. And as the nation's social needs have become more urgent over the past few decades, religious congregations have responded. They may well be providing more social services than ever before. I use the phrase "may well be" advisedly. Little hard data exist on the extent of social service provision by congregations now or in earlier times.

In this article I report the findings of my 1997 study, supported by Partners

Ram Cnaan is an associate professor in the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work. He is the author of Social and Community Involvement of Religious Congregations Housed in Historic Religious Properties, a report commissioned by Partners for Sacred Places. This article is drawn from that report.



RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

Lloyd Wolf

for Sacred Places, of 113 historic churches—all built before 1940 and still used as places of worship—in six American cities. Its purpose is to document the extent to which religious congregations are involved in community social service activity.

What Services?

My study consisted of extensive interviews by a research team with clergy, lay leaders, and social service providers in mostly urban churches in Chicago, Indianapolis, Mobile, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. Congregation size ranged widely—from a low of 20 to a high of 4,800—with an average membership of 624. Most congregations consisted mostly of one ethnic group. Of the 113 congregations, 90 reported that three-quarters or more of their members belonged to one ethnic group, usually either African American or Caucasian. The congregations ranged from politically and theologically conservative (the former tended to cluster in Indianapolis

and Mobile, the latter in Indianapolis, Mobile, and Philadelphia) to politically and theologically liberal (the former in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia, the latter in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York). Though some denominations were over-represented in particular cities, overall the sampling of denominational distribution was reasonably well balanced: 9 Presbyterian, 18 Baptist, 22 Episcopal, 11 Methodist, 18 Catholic, 10 Lutheran, and 25 others, including Jewish synagogues, independent churches, Pentecostal churches, and Friends Societies.

The 113 congregations in the sample reported providing a total of 449 social programs. One hundred and two (91 percent) provided at least one social service, and most offered more. Ninety-three percent of congregations in New York and 81 percent of those in Chicago reported offering five or more programs, as did 56 percent in Indianapolis, 50 percent in San Francisco, 44 percent in Philadelphia, and 24 percent

in Mobile (the low number of social programs in Mobile may be attributable to the more rural character of the congregations studied). The social services varied widely, an indication that congregations were targeting the unique needs of their communities. Programs offered most frequently included food pantries (almost 60 percent of the congregations), music performances (56 percent), clothing closets (52 percent), holiday celebrations (52 percent), community bazaars and fairs (50 percent), choral groups (50 percent), international relief (50 percent), recreational programs for teens (45 percent), alliances with neighborhood associations (44 percent), visits to patients in hospitals (44 percent), visits to the sick (43 percent), soup kitchens (41 percent), and recreational programs for children (41 percent).

Each of the six cities in the study tended to have a distinct profile. Chicago and Indianapolis congregations, for example, were especially involved in providing permanent housing for needy people; community economic development; and programs for families, for children and youth, for homeless and poor people, and for other people in need. Mobile congregations provided many programs for children and youth, services for homeless and poor people, and programs for permanent housing, but they were less involved in assisting refugees, immigrants, or prisoners. New York congregations were quite distinct, specializing in arts and culture and in community organizing, such as boycotts and protests. They offered few programs for children and few for refugees, immigrants, or prisoners. Philadelphia congregations offered more programs for seniors, children, and youth, as well as educational opportunities for adults. They were less involved in services for the homeless and poor people or for refugees, immigrants, or prisoners. San Francisco congregations offered many programs for homeless and poor people, services for poor immigrants and refugees, health programs, and community security services. They offered fewer programs for families, seniors, or children.

Who Participates?

Who benefits from the social services these religious congregations provide? Congregation members take part in the programs' services, of course, but they are far outnumbered by nonmembers. For the total sample, the mean number of participants per program provided by or housed in a local religious congregation was 207. The mean number of congregation members was 40—a ratio of nonmembers to members of 4.2 to 1. Broken down by city, the ratio of nonmembers to members was 3.2 to 1 in Chicago; 7.1 to 1 in Indianapolis; 1.9 to 1 in Mobile; 2.9 to 1 in New York; 5.2 to 1 in Philadelphia; and 6.3 to 1 in San Francisco. Clearly, the many social and community programs offered by local religious congregations are designed to benefit the community at large.

Although some services, such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Boy Scouts, were provided in the congregation's

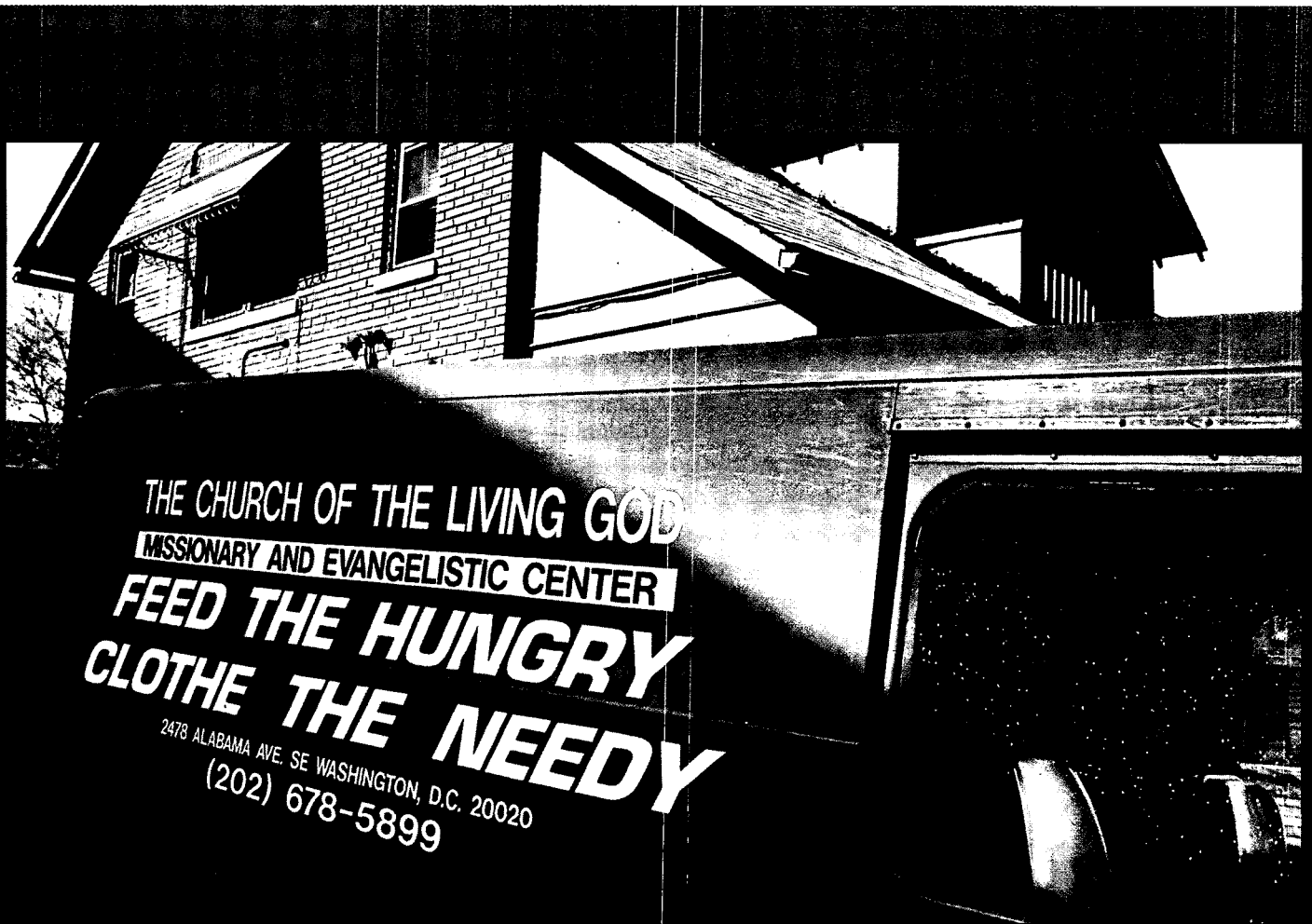
quarters entirely by nonmembers, members often assisted community volunteers. For the total sample, members slightly outnumbered nonmembers in providing services—by a ratio of 1.1 to 1. In Chicago and Indianapolis, nonmembers providing services slightly outnumbered members, indicating that the congregations were more likely to be involved in joint efforts with the community rather than in direct service to their community. In New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, by contrast, members providing services outnumbered nonmembers by roughly 2 to 1; the ratio was almost 3 to 1 in Mobile.

The Financial Commitment

How much did their social programs cost the congregations? Of 240 reported programs involving monetary expenditures by the congregations, 7 were unusually costly (more than \$5,000 a month). Those we omitted from our

calculations so as not to bias our findings upward. Of 233 remaining programs with monetary costs, the mean monthly cost was \$691. Monthly costs were highest in New York (\$1,006), lowest in Indianapolis (\$558). In addition to direct monetary support, congregations also provided space, particularly parish and fellowship halls and kitchens, classrooms, basements, and sanctuaries. The average market value of the space provided for each program was \$562 per month.

The value of church volunteers' time was also considerable. Of the 449 programs in the entire sample, 338 used volunteers. The monthly number of volunteer hours for the whole sample of congregations was 49,892, which averages out to 148 hours per program per month. Indianapolis reported the highest mean, 220 hours; Philadelphia reported the lowest, 79 hours. In 1991 the Independent Sector, a national orga-



nization studying volunteer activity nationwide, assessed the value of a volunteer hour at \$11.58. Using that figure results in an estimated monthly value for the whole sample of \$577,751. Clergy and staff also invest considerable time in community service programs. For the sample as a whole, clergy were involved in 236 of the 449 programs and staff in 216 programs. Clergy averaged 19 hours of work per program per month; staff averaged 67 hours.

Congregations also provided valuable in-kind support and utilities. In-kind support such as the use of phones, printing, photocopying, and postage, was reported for 191 of the 449 programs at a mean cost of \$71 per month. The cost of utilities—heating the building, cleaning it, wear-and-tear—amounted to a mean of \$218 a month for the 182 programs reporting such costs.

When we added the total costs reported for the programs and divided the result by the total number of programs, including nonreporting programs, we found that the average monetary value of a program was \$3,177 a month—or \$38,124 a year. Broken down by city, the lowest average monthly cost per program was in Philadelphia (\$2,025); the highest cost was in Indianapolis (\$4,157).

For the entire sample, the mean share of the annual operating budget allocated to social ministry was 17.4 percent. The highest share was 21.2 percent (in Philadelphia); the lowest was 13.1 percent (in Mobile).

Any money income or in-kind services received by the congregations in return for their support was minimal. Few programs generated any income for the congregations. Of the 54 that did, the mean was \$771 per program per month, or \$93 averaged out over the entire sample. Another 50 programs reported in-kind support valued at a mean of \$903 per reporting program, or \$101 per program for the whole sample.

The net congregational contribution to society (the total monthly per program contribution—\$3,177—less the monthly per program income—\$194) was \$2,984 per program per month, or

\$35,803 per program per year. On average, the subsidy congregations gave to their community programs was valued at more than \$140,000 a year. Note, however, that this mean is the value of the program, not the actual fiscal cost accrued by the studied congregations. In other words, we measured the value of services if they were given as a volunteer labor or as part of the maintenance of the congregation, as an equivalent secular service will require such services to be paid for with real money.

How Congregations Get Involved

The people most influential in initiating social services in our sample were the clergy and individual members or groups in the congregations. Congregational committees and staff members also initiated services. Few programs were organized in response to requests from people or groups outside the congregation. Together, other congregations, diocese, judicatory, neighborhood coalitions, human service organizations, and government agencies were responsible for initiating just over 15 percent of all reported social programs.

Many of the programs—165 of the total of 449—were begun in response to a change in the community. Of the others, 63 grew out of local cutbacks in public spending, 61 out of cuts in state spending, and 67 out of cuts in federal spending. New York reported the greatest response to cuts in public spending. Such cuts spurred few social programs in Indianapolis and Mobile. There, congregations reported that community service was a way to witness their faith. In fact, congregations did not see government cutbacks as the reason for their involvement. Rather they told us that they reacted to observed needs in the community.

A Beacon in the Night

In an era in which mutual aid societies are practically vanishing, religious congregations continue to carry out social programs in most American communities. Their perseverance in an era of downsizing and declining corporate support is a clear message to their

neighbors and society at large of resolution and faith. A 1995 study by S. Verba, K.L. Scholzman, and H.E. Brady found local religious congregations to be the most important source of civic competence in contemporary America, especially for people of low income. Our findings support the importance of local religious congregations in enhancing local quality of life and contributing to the formation of civil society.

Today, as responsibility for social programs is being devolved from the federal government to state and local authorities, congregations and religiously affiliated entities—the least studied and least understood actors in contemporary public life—are beginning to gain notice in public discourse.

Not that the issue is simple. Some of the religious groups that provide social services adhere to values that are not popular and that can be offensive to some groups. Some Americans are uncomfortable with the notion that religious congregations consider providing social services to be ministry and yet are a key element of the local welfare system, actively supporting the neediest members of our society.

Congregations are highly involved in social service in their communities and beyond. Their voluntary effort serves as a vital backbone for civic society in America. That congregations throughout the nation come to the help of those in need is a uniquely American social institution, one that is insufficiently acknowledged publicly, let alone celebrated by the members of the congregations and their clergy.

Yet no matter how much congregations exert themselves, they cannot even begin to fill the gaps created by the devolution of federal responsibility for social welfare to states and localities. The impressive network of services provided by congregations is at best important locally, a complement to state services. And as important as providing social and community services is to religious congregations, it is nevertheless a secondary goal—and one dependent on the congregation's ability to master sufficient resources and human capital to reach it. ■

Some Thoughts on What the Congregations Do

In November and December 1997, Brookings—in cooperation with Partners for Sacred Places and with help from the Pew Charitable Trusts—organized two meetings on the role of churches, synagogues, and mosques in fighting poverty and alleviating social distress. The meetings were animated by the conviction that while government had an essential role to play in the tasks of fighting crime, family breakup, drug addiction, and joblessness, it would not succeed on its own. The work of social reconstruction is civic and community work in which the churches have always been deeply implicated.

Participants were urged to address four questions. Which forms of social service and social action are the congregations particularly well placed to perform, and which tasks might they perform better than government? What could government do to help—and also not to hinder—these efforts, and what forms of government participation might be dangerous, either to the religiously based social action or to religious freedom, or both? What responsibilities did the wealthier congregations have to their poorer brother and sister congregations? And how did cuts in government assistance to the poor affect the work of religious charities?

What follows are excerpts from the discussions.

I am well aware of the good work that churches are doing to serve the poor in all communities. The difficulty I have is not with the good work, but with the jump that is made between churches out there doing good work and the need to use taxpayer money to do it.

Julie Siegel
Americans United for Separation of
Church and State

One of the things that is vitally important in every facet of this American experiment is what I would call “community organizing,” bringing people together. Not doing things for people, but calling forth what’s inside of them. Churches do that very well. It’s not a question of religion. It’s a question of inspiration and trust in the human being. Churches are the base operators of great community organizing, where people can be brought together to do for themselves. That’s the type of effort that should be supported. And we have to find a way in the nation whereby to separate what I would call pure religion and just the honest to God work of helping people—and support one and not the other.

Father Michael Doyle
Sacred Heart Church, Camden, N.J.

It’s really not about religion. It’s about what kinds of mechanisms can resurrect hope and create the material and spiritual basis for children surviving. If faith-based institutions can reduce crime, contribute to the reestablishment of the rule of law, reintroduce some minimal, normative presuppositions about order, value, and meaning for a generation of young children who may otherwise drown in their own blood, the question becomes an ethical one: is the state morally obligated to facilitate the reduction of needless suffering in the lives of children?

Eugene Rivers
Azusa Christian Community, Boston

I’ve been a pastor on the South Side of Chicago for about 12 years now. I want to remind everyone how much regulation of our private work in churches already exists. My church of 270 people has a budget of \$350,000. Because we work with children, because we work with the elderly, because we work with the sick and the poor, our private building is now a public building. We are inspected. We have to meet all kinds of new regulations every year. And don’t think that the government is prepared to help us actually understand what these regulations are and accomplish them without having to close down.

Rev. Susan Johnson
Chicago, Illinois

VICIPURPOSES

When most people think of the homeless, they think of 55-year-old white alcoholics. The truth is that 80 percent of the homeless are under 45 years of age. The majority are minorities. And 70 percent live in the community on a regular basis. They're not hitchhiking into our towns. They're falling out of our inner cities and our housing projects and they're in and out of homelessness on a consistent basis.

Steve Berger
Int'l. Union of Gospel Missions

It seems really different when you think about a church-based group running a youth development program than the church being the place where everybody has to apply for food stamps. I think we should think about it in a very different context.

Sharon Parrott
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

We have 260 Gospel Rescue Missions that every day feed more than 100,000 meals and sleep more than 30,000 men, women, and kids. Last year we collected \$350 million, practically none of it from the government. One thing that needs to be mentioned is government interference in our work. We have missions today that can't expand because the government says there will be no more social service agencies or no more beds in a certain area. The Newark mission is in court right now—because a Muslim who voluntarily entered a nongovernment-paid-for program, entered it knowing it was a Christian-based program that believed in conversion, sued the Good Will Home in Newark. That mission is in court and the opponents they're fighting are government-funded legal services. They have spent more than \$50,000 as of today to defend their right to preach the Gospel in their rehabilitation program. And in Richmond, California, the mission has just been cut off from food stamps because it has religion as part of its program.

Steve Berger
Int'l. Union of Gospel Missions

The reason we're having this conversation is that a lot of old solutions have proven to be not all that helpful. We're in a time when an awful lot is being redefined. The role of government at all levels is being redefined, but so is the role of religion. The entire American experiment is going through a very important testing time, when we must find new ways to think about the relationship of religion and social life.

Jim Wind
Alban Institute

A typical large American corporation has a policy that says, "If employees give money up to a certain amount to charitable organizations, we, the firm, will match that amount." If employees give money to Harvard or Chicago or some other university, or if they give the money to the symphony orchestra or the Philharmonic, it will be matched up to a certain dollar. But none of these organizations will match money going to churches. Now I don't believe there is a legal reason for not doing this. I believe corporations regard church-based giving the way many Americans regard the relationship between church and state. Warily. So if you want to change the giving pattern, one place to start is to ask large corporations to modify the way they match contributions so that faith-based organizations are on the list.

James Q. Wilson
UCLA

No one on this panel is talking seriously about turning the inner cities over to the churches or their congregations. Just to think about that purely in the social services vein would be preposterous. Take public cash assistance and food stamps—you're talking about more than \$80 billion a year. To replace that entirely the 250,000 plus congregations in this country would each have to increase their giving by \$300,000 a year.

John DiIulio, Jr.
Princeton University

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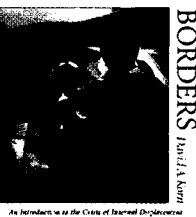
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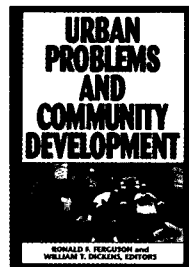
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